

Bad boy no more

The rehabilitation of Gaddafi's Libya

Wonders never cease in the apparently prosaic world of international politics. First, Iraq was invaded on the ground that it possessed WMD, and it turned out that it had none. Now Libya — which few suspected of possessing WMD — has announced that it will be dismantling its WMD and invited inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to oversee the process. Neo-conservatives rushed to take credit, arguing that it took the war in Iraq to change President Gaddafi's mind on the advisability of pursuing a WMD programme. However, it has now been revealed that secret negotiations leading to the current disclosures have been underway between Tripoli, London and Washington for the last nine months, which means they began before, or just about when, the invasion of Iraq was launched. Tripoli came to the table with a proposal for inspections, it is President Bush who may have been prevaricating. There could be a number of reasons for this. Bush knows he will have to face down entrenched opposition to rehabilitating Libya in the Washington establishment if IAEA inspectors give it a clean bill. Or perhaps Washington was simply too preoccupied with Iraq. Most likely, a combination of both factors was responsible.

Actually, co-operation between Tripoli and Washington has been ongoing since 9/11, when a lot of information on Al-Qaeda was fed to Washington by Libya's competent intelligence services. And that provides a hint to what President Muammar Gaddafi's intentions might be for backing the deal with Washington and London. Facing crippling US and UN sanctions which have led to a stagnant economy and suboptimal exploitation of its oil wealth, Libya was also racked by Islamist insurgency in the late nineties, and gains made by Al Qaeda in the region would have been to its detriment. It was faced with a double whammy, as economic discontent fed into Islamist sentiments that destabilized Libya's polity.

Faced with this situation Gaddafi chose to make peace on at least one front, even if it entailed swallowing a bit of national pride. Even earlier, Tripoli had turned a new leaf by ceasing sponsorship of international terrorist groups, and paying \$3.6 billion in compensation to the victims of the bombing of a Pan Am aircraft over Lockerbie — actions which earned it a reprieve from being included in Bush's "axis of evil". It has also turned in, as a peace gesture, the two men responsible for the bombing. The appointment of Shukri Ghanem as prime minister last year indicates what's on Gaddafi's mind lately — Ghanem is an economist with a reform and modernization agenda. Gaddafi has found out that economic and social improvement cannot be carried out at home while exporting terrorism abroad. It is a lesson that Musharraf would do well to heed.

THE STATESMAN 27 DEC 2004

Teheran flaunts missile might

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Associated Press

TEHERAN, Dec. 25. — Iran's defence minister has said his country would strike back with its long-range Shahab-3 missile if Israel attacked its nuclear facilities.

Mr Ali Shamkhani was responding to comments made last month by Israeli defence minister Mr Shaul Mofaz, who said Israel would not permit Iran to develop nuclear weapons — a hint it was prepared to take unilateral military action.

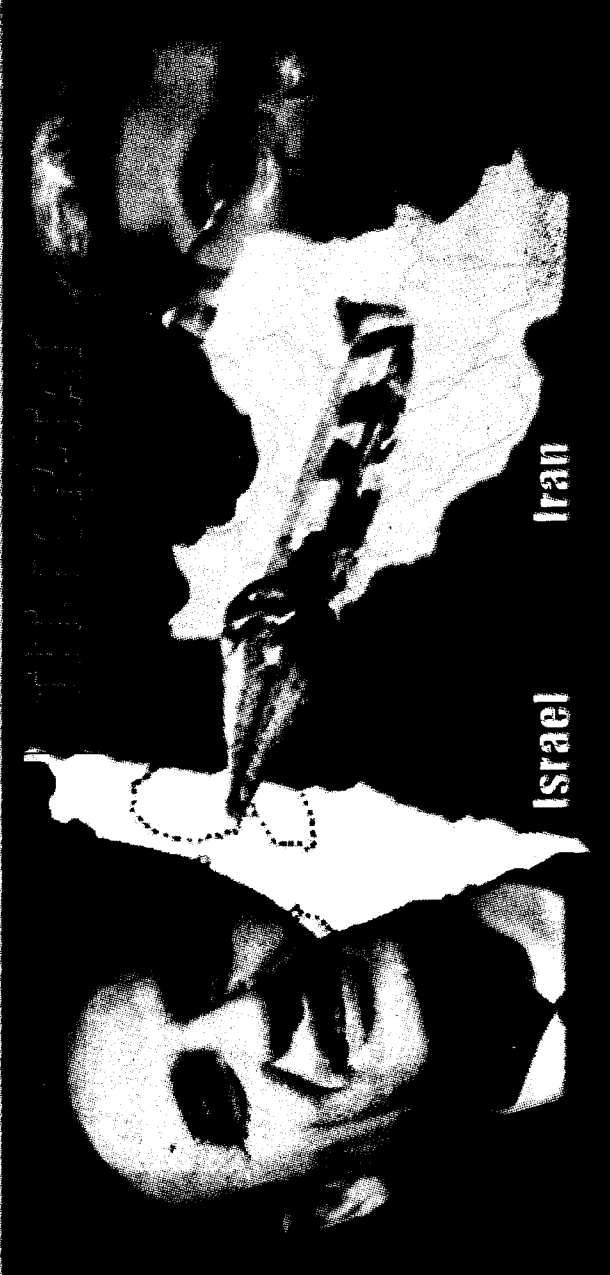
"We will strike Israel with all weapons at our disposal if the Zionist regime ventures to do so," Mr Shamkhani said yesterday in comments carried by the official Islamic Republic News Agency. He

said the Shahab-3, able to reach Israel, was one of the weapons that would be used.

The Shahab-3, officially deployed to the military last July, has a range of about 1,300 km. Israel is about 965 km west of Iran.

Mr Shamkhani's comments marked the second Iranian response in two days. On Tuesday, reporters outside parliament asked Mr Shamkhani and President Mohamed Khatami about Mr Mofaz's statement. The minister responded: "No place will be safe in Israel."

The President, meanwhile, scoffed at the Israeli words. "Israel will make a damn mistake" if they attack Iran, Mr Khatami said with a smile, in footage aired on state-run TV. Mr Shamkhani said yes-



Iran's defence minister has warned that the country was prepared to use its long-range Shahab-3 missile if Israel attacked its nuclear facilities. Israeli defence minister has recently said Tel-Aviv would not permit Iran to develop nuclear weapons.

terday that Mr Mofaz's rael was "an evil entity". garrison," he said. "The ishing the dream of a rule statement proved that Is- "Israel is a fragile glass Zionist leaders are cher- over the globe."

Terror

11/27/12 ✓
LIBYA'S PRUDENT DECISION ✓

LIBYA'S DECISION TO dismantle its weapons of mass destruction programme and throw open all related facilities to full scope inspections has sharpened the debate on whether force or persuasion is more effective in solving global problems. The United States would, of course, attribute Libya's abrupt turnaround to the fear instilled in "rogue states" by its invasion of Iraq. Libya does figure in the U.S. State Department's list of rogue states and there are sufficient American forces in the Mediterranean and Europe to lend credibility to a military threat. However, Tripoli could have reasonably calculated that the military and diplomatic capacities of the U.S. are currently so over-stretched because of its involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan that it cannot initiate operations in yet another part of the world. The Libyan leadership has actually displayed a measure of astuteness in staying a step ahead of those who would pose a threat. It began negotiations with the United Nations in the late 1990s, on the surrender of two citizens suspected of involvement in the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Lockerbie, before it was subjected to military pressure. It also initiated the discussions with the U.S. and the United Kingdom that led to the decision on dismantling non-conventional weapons at a time when these two powers were fully engaged in preparations for the invasion of Iraq. The developments on the Libyan front show that the objectives of the international community can be achieved through non-violent means if recalcitrant countries are provided the incentive to change their ways.

Libya decided to give up its non-conventional weapons programme largely because of economic considerations. It has to revamp and diversify its oil-based economy. The U.N. lifted sanctions earlier this year after Libya accepted responsibility for the Lockerbie outrage and

agreed to pay \$2.7 billion to the families of the 270 victims. That has opened the way for British and Italian companies to invest in the oil sector. However, Tripoli believes that U.S.-based companies must play the major role if the full potential of its oil sector is to be realised. American oil companies cannot invest so long as the Bush administration continues to impose sanctions. Washington insists that it will not lift sanctions until the weapons programme is completely dismantled. This policy is not detrimental to Libya alone. Concessions awarded to American firms have been inoperable so far and will become unavailable once the contracts expire in 2005. That Libya is able to make the best of these circumstances is remarkable given its current diplomatic isolation. It broke with its Arab brethren after they moved towards rapprochement with Israel, but has not succeeded in the efforts to integrate with an African bloc.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration appears to have drawn the wrong conclusions at the end of the negotiations. It argues, vaingloriously, that Libya's mercurial leader Muammar Qaddafi was induced to change his policy for fear that he would suffer the fate that befell the former leaders of Afghanistan and Iraq. Washington's success in keeping France and Germany out of the negotiations has only strengthened its belief in the utility of a unilateral approach. The European powers, acting in concert, recently persuaded Iran to abandon its nuclear weapon programme. They did so without threatening to use force and by making Teheran aware of its own best interests. Libya too appears to have changed its policy after considering the totality of its circumstances. However, the U.S. appears determined to devalue the multilateral approach as it seeks to establish that international events will be shaped only by the power of the hegemon.

THE HINDU

25 DEC 2004

BLOODIEST BOUT IN RECENT MONTHS LEAVES EIGHT PALESTINIANS, TWO ISRAELI ARMYMEN DEAD

Gaza writhes under spell of violence

Agencies

GAZA CITY, Dec. 23. — At least eight Palestinians and two Israeli army officers were killed in the Gaza Strip during one of the bloodiest bouts of violence in the region in recent months, sources on both sides said today.

Five Palestinians were killed during a major pre-dawn army incursion into the Rafah refugee camp in southern Gaza, which came hours after the two soldiers died in a grenade attack by a Palestinian militant in the centre of the territory.

The Palestinian attacker was shot by other soldiers and during an ensuing search a second Palestinian opened fire on troops, and was shot in his turn, Israeli military sources said. Palestinian medical and security sources said the five who were killed in Rafah had died after exchanges of fire with the Israeli troops during the operation by some 15 jeeps and armoured vehicles. At least 17 other Palestinians were wounded in the ongoing operation during which several houses were damaged.

An army spokesman confirmed that an incursion was taking place in Rafah to "destroy tunnels linking the Gaza Strip with Egypt for arms smuggling". Among the lat-



ON THE RUN: A Palestinian woman with her children runs away from clashes between Palestinian gunmen and Israeli troops in Rafah refugee camp on Tuesday. — AFP

est victims was one Khamis Anwar Al-Rahi, a 21-year-old member of the armed wing of the radical Islamic Jihad movement. He died of his injuries after being struck by shell fragments, sources said. Palestinian security officials said three other men — Ayed Najjar, 24, Halil al Kassas, 50, and Ali Majah, 22, — died in exchanges of fire with the Israeli troops during the operation.

'Attack will strengthen Egypt'



Mr Maher at Al-Aqsa mosque on Monday. — AFP

CAIRO, Dec. 23. — Egyptian foreign minister Mr Ahmed Maher was back home today vowing the attack on him yesterday at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque compound would only harden Egypt's determination to push for Palestinian-Israeli peace talks to resume. Mr Maher said after returning here late yesterday that the attack by some Palestinians "will only strengthen Egypt's determination to work for peace."

Witnesses said suspected members of a fringe group called the 66-year-old minister a "traitor" and hurled shoes at him as he went to pray in the mosque. — AFP

Egypt minister beaten in Jerusalem



Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Maher after the assault in Jerusalem. (Reuters)

Jerusalem, Dec. 22 (Reuters): Radical worshippers assaulted Egyptian foreign minister Ahmed Maher in the al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem's Old City today and he was rushed to hospital, witnesses, police and security guards said.

Initial reports said Maher, 68, was physically beaten and taken unconscious to hospital but witnesses and police later said he was accosted, jostled and possibly struck several times by a hostile mob shouting "Allah-u-Akbar" (God is Great).

The mob shouted "traitor" and "collaborator" at Maher and

threw shoes they had doffed for prayers at his entourage and at Israeli police taking him out of the mosque to safety.

Television footage of the incident showed Maher, pale and struggling for breath, being escorted out of the mosque by police and bodyguards through a screaming crowd. Israeli medics said Maher, who had just completed talks on West Asia peace issues with Israeli leaders, was treated for shortness of breath and was in good condition.

After receiving treatment near the mosque, he was taken to Hadassah hospital for checks,

and Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom went to the hospital to see him.

Israeli television said Maher had apparently suffered an asthma attack because he was seen using an inhaler shortly after the incident inside the mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine.

"A group of Palestinian extremists started shouting at Maher and calling him a traitor and collaborator and then they were trying to reach him but guards (nearby) prevented them," a mosque guard who witnessed the incident said.

Palestinian Prime Minister

Ahmed Qurie said he was "shocked and furious" over the attack on Maher, whose country signed the Arab world's first peace treaty with Israel in 1979.

The hostility shown to Maher followed a rebuff by Palestinian militants to high-level Egyptian efforts to broker a ceasefire between them and Israel. An Israeli foreign ministry spokesman said the government would investigate the incident in the elevated mosque compound known as al Haram al Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) to Muslims and the Temple Mount to Jews and Christians.

Libya allows snap nuclear inspection

America nudges in final push



Muammar Gaddafi

Vienna, Dec. 21 (Reuters): Libya has agreed to allow snap UN nuclear arms inspections, just a day after declaring it was giving up plans to build an atomic bomb, a Western diplomat said today.

Libya, widely praised for announcing on Friday that it was ditching efforts to build the bomb and other banned weapons, told the head of the UN nuclear watchdog yesterday it was ready to sign up to inspections, the diplomat said.

The surprise moves, which could lead to the end of US sanctions and the return of US oil companies, mark an about-face for Muammar Gaddafi, Libyan leader for 34 years.

"We are turning our swords into ploughshares and this step should be appreciated and followed by all other countries," Libyan Prime Minister Shokri Ghanem said of Friday's statement, adding economic progress was more important than arms.

But Britain, which played a key role in talks that persuaded

lators to concerns about domestic threats to his own rule.

Tripoli acted swiftly to show it was serious. A top official met the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna yesterday to discuss its proposals to accept stricter IAEA nuclear safeguards.

The Vienna-based diplomat said Libya told Mohammed El-Baradei it would open its atomic facilities to unannounced inspections, a deal going beyond the basic demands of the main nuclear arms control treaty.

Libya is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, allowing limited IAEA inspections, but said it was now willing to sign the treaty's Additional Protocol that allows far more intrusive checks. Iran signed it on Thursday after pressure from Washington over an alleged arms programme.

Libyan foreign minister Mohamed Aberrrhmane Chalgaï said in Algiers: "Our delegation is still in negotiations in Vienna."

Tripoli to abandon its arms ambitions, said the fate that befell Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein may have prompted the move.

Defence secretary Geoff Hoon suggested the fortunes of the Iraqi leader, overthrown by US and British forces in April and finally captured hiding in a dirt hole a week ago, might have been different had Baghdad been more forthcoming over arms.

"We showed after Saddam Hussein failed to cooperate with the UN that we meant business and Libya, and I hope other countries, will draw that lesson," he told Sky television.

The US and Britain, which was pivotal in isolating Libya after the Lockerbie bombing 15 years ago today, accused Saddam of developing banned arms and weapons has been found.

US intelligence officials said Gaddafi seemed the driving force behind Libya's decision and his motivation may have ranged from concerns about the Iraq war and a desire to end iso-

ing all sorts of people."

The intelligence officers were accompanied at all times by Libyan intelligence, drivers changed cars along the way and the Westerners were ushered into office buildings for meetings with Gaddafi that started after 11 pm.

"Operationally, we did conduct this entire business as secretly as we possibly could so it indeed was the result of a series of secret meetings in Europe and then of course trips clandestinely to Libya," a US intelligence official who was on the visits said.

Gaddafi's representatives initiated the process in mid-March by asking Britain to broker talks with the US on its programmes to develop weapons of mass destruction. When Libya learned how much the US already knew about its weapons programmes, that appeared to give Tripoli the final push to give up its banned weapons.

A team of American and British intelligence officers flew to Libya clandestinely in October and December for stretches of about two weeks, visiting sites where they were shown parts of the country's chemical, nuclear and missile programmes.

"The Libyans are very focused on extremism and have made some contributions to the war on terrorism," one of the intelligence officials said. "We're hopeful that we can indeed do some collaborative work against some of the extremist groups who are threaten-

WEST ASIA / SETBACK TO PEACE, SAYS QUREI

3 killed in Israeli air raid

GAZA, OCT. 20. Israel today launched rapid-fire air raids on the Gaza Strip, killing two Hamas militants and a Palestinian bystander in a missile strike and wounding 14 people in the bombing of a building.

The attacks, the latest in a cycle of tit-for-tat violence that has stalled a U.S.-backed peace plan, came after gunmen killed three Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and before the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, delivered a policy speech to Parliament.

In the bloodiest of three Israeli strikes carried out in five hours, a helicopter-fired missile hit a mini-van at a traffic light in densely populated Gaza City.

Hamas sources said two members of the Islamic militant group were burnt to death in the attack. Supporters screaming for revenge flooded into Ga-

za's Shifa hospital where their bodies were taken.

A 35-year-old man in a nearby car was also killed and nine people were wounded, medics said. Three hours earlier, an Israeli warplane bombed a building next to the home of Islamic Jihad leader Abdallah al-Shami in Gaza. The Israeli army said it had not been aiming for Mr. Shami but instead had destroyed a Hamas weapons workshop next door.

Islamic militants have come under intensified attack by Israel following a recent spate of suicide bombings.

The Palestinian Prime Minister, Ahmed Qurei said the air strikes made it harder for Israel and the Palestinians to hold talks on ending three years of violence. "Unfortunately, this is part of the permanent Israeli

aggression against the Palestinians," he told reporters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

Jibril Rajoub, the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat's senior security adviser, said: "The Israelis have to realise that their aggression against Palestinians only brings suffering, blood and lack of security for them."

Later, a helicopter gunship fired a missile that destroyed a one-room building on the outskirts of Gaza City. No casualties were reported.

The army said it hit a Hamas weapons storage site.

Palestinian medics said at least 14 civilians, including four women and four children, suffered light to moderate shrapnel injuries in the bombing raid in Gaza. Mr. Shami told *Al Jazeera* television he had been the target of the air strike. — Reuters

THE HINDU 21 DEC 2004

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TURNAROUND

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Messrs Blair and Bush are terribly excited about having brought Libya around. It looks like victory of a very different flavour — the triumph of diplomacy. And this time, nobody had to go around looking for those weapons of mass destruction, to be made to look foolish (or mendacious) when they could not be found. The Libyan foreign minister has himself declared their existence in his country, only to renounce them publicly. Libya would immediately conform to the chemical weapons convention and to the protocols set by the International Atomic Energy Agency. This is certainly an important shift in relations between Libya (so far a somewhat less visible player in the axis of evil) and the United States of America, mediated by its principal ally, Britain. But the importance is more symbolic than actual. Libya's WMD, as well as its nuclear achievements, were never significant enough to create any real alarm, and what little there had been of either, including the mustard gas, had already been more or less inhibited by international safeguards. However, with this diplomatic move, Mr Muammar Gaddafi's Nasser-style Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism and Islamic radicalism come of post-9/11 age, as he enters a different set of political and economic bargains with the US and Britain.

The lifting of the crippling sanctions on Libya may now follow, and this is the culmination of long negotiations, starting with the Lockerbie settlement, when Mr Gaddafi took responsibility for the bombing and agreed to compensate. There is a le Carré-esque twist to Libya's secret dialogues with the British. These were led by Mr Musa Kousa, now Mr Gaddafi's head of external intelligence, who was, not that long ago in the Eighties, a notorious *persona non grata* with the British for his role in a spate of killings of Libyan dissidents across Europe and in the blowing up of a French plane with 170 people on it. Mr Kousa's turn-around epitomizes Libya's discreet enrolment into Mr Bush's war on terror. Part of the deal is that Libya will now share, with the US and Britain, its sophisticated network of intelligence missions throughout Africa and west Asia, and detailed intelligence on hundreds of al Qaida and other Islamic extremists. Yesterday's terrorist is today's diplomat-intelligencer.

Good boy Gaddafi scraps WMDs

W/13/12
Libya 11-15
2/1/12



THThis file photograph shows Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi flashing the victory sign through the bars of Nelson Mandela's prison cell on Robben Island off Cape Town.

US, Britain hint at lifting sanctions

Reuters
Tripoli/New York, December 20

LIBYA MADE clear on Saturday it wanted to come in from the cold after decades as a pariah state and Britain and the US pledged to reward its decision to abandon its banned weapons programmes.

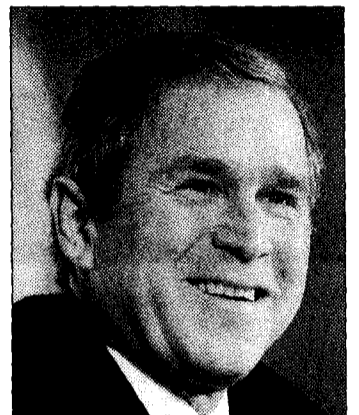
Muammar Gaddafi's Libya, which Britain said had been close to making an atomic bomb, opened the prospect of an end to sanctions and the possible return of US oil companies with its pledge on Friday to stop seeking weapons of mass destruction. But some US officials cautioned that Libya's move, the culmination of secret negotiations that began just before the US-led Iraq war, still left it too early to say when and if Washington will lift sanctions.

President Bush immediately praised Libya for taking "essential steps" on the weapons programmes and said: "It's good faith will be returned." He also said the US and Britain would work to ensure that Libya, which said it made the decision "of its own free will", lives up to its commitments.

"Today's announcement shows that we can fight this menace through more than purely military means; that we can defeat it peacefully, if countries are prepared in good faith to work with the international community to dismantle such weapons," British Prime Minister Tony Blair said. Perhaps with an eye on North Korea and Iran and what Washington says is their nuclear weapons programme.

"Libya wants to solve all problems and we want to focus on development and advancing our country. This programme does not benefit our people or country," Foreign Minister Mohamed Abderrhmane Chalgam told al-Jazeera television.

The Libyan announcement came ahead of Sunday's 15th anniversary of the Christmas bombing of a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270 people. Libya escaped broader UN-imposed international sanctions earlier this year after accepting responsibility for the attack and paying out billions to the families of victims.



George Bush
'Libya an example for others'

Washington left its sanctions in place, citing suspicions Tripoli was seeking biological and chemical weapons.

Washington bans most economic activity and bars citizens from travelling to Libya on US passports without government permission. Washington last month renewed this passport restrictions for a year but said it would review the matter every three months.

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw praised Gaddafi on Saturday, saying on BBC radio: "He needs to be applauded in unqualified terms for what he has done. I believe it is very statesmanlike and courageous."

US officials said Libya's nuclear programme was "much further advanced" than believed, and it had acknowledged cooperating with North Korea to develop Scud missiles.

But while a senior Bush Administration official said Libya was moving "in the right direction", when sanctions might end was too early to determine.

Lifting sanctions could allow US oil companies back into Libya, where US firms were at one time producing more than 1 million barrels per day and where oil facilities could be enhanced to reach 2 million bpd within five years, according to the US Department of Energy.

A US official said Libya approached the US and Britain in mid-March and this led to visits to weapons sites in October and early December by US and British teams.

Sharon threatens unilateral steps

Herzliya (Israel): Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has warned time was running out for the West Asia peace roadmap



A. Sharon

and that he would implement his own unilateral measures if the Palestinians did not meet their commitments within months.

"We wish to speedily advance implementation of the roadmap towards a quiet and genuine peace," Mr Sharon said in a keynote speech here on Thursday.

"We hope that the Palestinian Authority will carry out its part. However, if in a few months the Palestinians still continue to disregard their part in implementing the roadmap, then Israel will initiate the unilateral security step of disengagement from the Palestinians."

His speech brought immediate condemnation from the Palestinians with Premier Ahmed Korei saying that he was disappointed by the "threats" from Mr Sharon while a top aide to veteran leader Yasser Arafat said it amounted to a rejection of the roadmap.

A leader of the hardline Palestinian Islamic Jihad group called his speech a "recipe for more violence."

Mr Sharon also came under fire from Israeli settlers after warning that settlements would be evacuated under the terms of a programme of unilateral disengagement.

"The relocation of settlements will be made first and foremost in order to draw the most efficient security line possible, thereby creating this (unilateral) disengagement between Israel and the Palestinians," Mr Sharon said.

Israel would also speed up the construction of a security barrier that dips deep into the West Bank and would use it as part of new security lines with the Palestinians intended to make it easier for Israel to defend itself, he said.

Showing new displeasure with Israel, the US on Thursday criticised Mr Sharon's vow to take unilateral steps within months. "We don't think it's best at this point to be discussing now what to do if progress is not made because we're staying focused working with the parties to achieve progress on the roadmap," said White House spokesman Scott McClellan. Agencies

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2003

WAS ✓
REFOCUSING ON PEACE

AN INFORMAL AGREEMENT drafted by Israeli and Palestinian private citizens cannot end a conflict that has raged for over half a century. However, in combination with several other developments, the accord has pushed all parties concerned to re-examine their preoccupation with the ongoing violence. It has come as a timely reminder that constructive solutions to the underlying issues have been formulated over the years and they must now be availed of. The Geneva Accord, as it is called, does not break new ground but only consolidates and clarifies all the points on which the two parties could reach tentative agreement in the many negotiations conducted since 1991. It provides for the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel and the restoration of the border that existed till the 1967 war, with some modifications. It proposes that settlements adjacent to the border should be incorporated into Israel and that the Palestinians should be compensated with land equal in extent and quality to the annexed portion. The remaining settlements along with the infrastructure necessary for their maintenance should be handed over to the Palestinians. Jerusalem should be divided with the Arab populated part of the city reverting to full Palestinian control. While the accord stipulates a demilitarised Palestinian state, it makes provision for a multinational force as a buffer against an Israeli offensive. The accord does not make any mention of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their former homes in Israel. However, it provides for their resettlement in the Palestinian state and compensation for their loss. It also allows the two parties to share control over religious sites in a just and equitable manner.

While the Palestinian Authority and the United States administration approved the intent and efforts of those who drafted the Geneva Accord, they did not wholeheartedly endorse the final docu-

ment. An adverse reaction from the inhabitants of refugee camps, who were upset about the non-mention of the right of return, was not the only factor that inhibited Palestinian President Yasser Arafat from endorsing the accord. Mr. Arafat could not agree to the concessions he would have to make when the Israeli Government has not made any reciprocal commitment. Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon rejected the accord outright and accused compatriots who participated in the drafting exercise of undermining the Government and its policy. The unravelling of disastrous Iraq policy appears to have forced the U.S. administration to change its approach of paying lip service to the "road map for peace" while refusing to criticise Israeli transgressions. Secretary of State Colin Powell pointedly snubbed the Sharon Government by refusing to heed its plea that he should not meet with the architects of the accord.

Other developments have eroded the Sharon Government's claim that it has the mandate to pursue a harsh policy towards the Palestinians. The current commander of the Israeli military and four former chiefs of its internal security organisation have openly criticised an oppressive policy that drives more Palestinian youth to the ranks of the extremists. A signature campaign in support of another draft agreement similar to the accord has begun to gather momentum on both sides of the divide. Palestinian extremist organisations have not carried out a major attack for over two months despite Israeli provocations. They are currently meeting in Cairo with Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei and Egyptian facilitators to hammer out the details of a ceasefire they are prepared to observe. With the Palestinians indicating their interest in a truce and the U.S. and key components of the Israeli security establishment urging a change in approach, Mr. Sharon is under pressure to mend his ways.

THE HINDU 8 DEC 2003

Israel, U.S. differ on peace plan

*H. Adin (w)
FD-12*

JERUSALEM, DEC. 5. The Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, faced today a rift with Washington over an unofficial peace plan he opposes and an opinion poll showing his popularity had dipped to its lowest point since he took office.

In another possible challenge to the right-wing leader, Mr. Sharon's deputy and political ally, Ehud Olmert, suggested in a newspaper interview Israel may have no choice but to give up most of the West Bank if it hopes to maintain a Jewish majority.

Stinging Mr. Sharon with his own veiled rebuke, the U.S. President, George W. Bush, threw his weight yesterday behind a meeting his Secretary of State, Colin Powell, was to hold today with the co-authors of a symbolic peace plan known as the Geneva Accord.

"I think it's productive," Mr. Bush said of the proposal by a leading Israeli dove, Yossi Beilin, and the former Palestinian Minister, Yasser Abed Rabbo.

Under the Geneva deal, Israel would give up West Bank and Gaza territories occupied in the 1967 W Asia war to Palestinians to set up a state, also the end goal of a U.S.-backed "road map" that Bush reaffirmed in his remarks.

But unlike the vague road map, it lays out solutions to deep-seated disputes by mandating the removal of most Jewish settlements on occupied land — seen by Mr. Sharon as essential to Israeli security — and giving Israel the right to decide how many Palestinian refugees of wars since 1948 to take back.

A Sharon aide suggested yesterday that Washington would be interfering in domestic politics by giving a stage to the Geneva initiators, fanning a rare public argument between Israel and its closest friend.

A new opinion poll in *Maariv* newspaper showed the launch of the accord in Geneva on Monday had failed to rally support for the plan among Israelis.

The survey said 29 per cent backed the pact, compared with 27 per cent before its formal unveiling, and 45 per cent opposed it.

Slump in popularity

Mr. Sharon's popularity meanwhile, has slipped steadily since the collapse in August of a ceasefire Palestinian militants declared in June shattered a sense of security that had begun returning. The *Maariv* poll found that only 33 per cent of Israelis were satisfied with Mr. Sharon's performance.

Negotiations could be key to the start of a dialogue between Mr. Sharon and the Palestinian Prime Minister, Ahmed Qurei, on advancing along the road map. Lending his voice to comments by Israeli leaders on possible unilateral moves should peacemaking fail, Mr. Olmert — Mr. Sharon's Vice-Premier — appeared to propose a wider pullback from occupied West Bank lands than the prime minister has suggested.

He told the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper Israel and any occupied land it retains should have a combined population 80 per cent Jewish and 20 per cent Arab to guarantee the survival of a Jewish state. — Reuters

Don't meddle in our politics, Israel tells US

Jerusalem, December 4

AN ADVISER to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon urged Washington on Thursday not to meddle in Israeli politics in the latest show of displeasure over planned US talks with authors of a symbolic West Asia peace pact.

The rare public row between Israel and its chief ally continued to smoulder as Palestinian factions opened negotiations in Cairo aimed at reaching an agreement on a truce considered crucial to reviving US-backed peace moves.

Secretary of State Colin Powell was due to meet on Friday with Israeli and Palestinian architects of the Geneva Accord, a plan Sharon has rejected as capitulation.

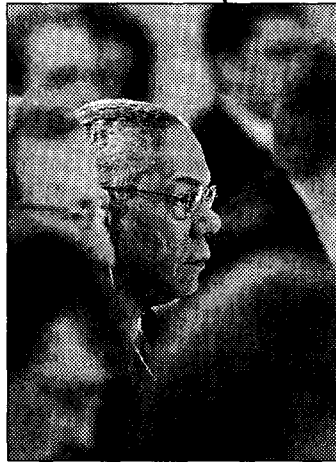
The planned talks in Washington have drawn unusually sharp Israeli criticism of the US, which has signalled impatience with Sharon's foot-dragging on a stalled international "roadmap" to end three years of violence.

The unofficial Geneva deal, drawn up by Israeli left-wing opposition figures and Palestinian politicians, has been denounced by Israel's right-wing government for requiring Israel to share sovereignty over Jerusalem and hand over occupied land to Palestinians for a state.

"It is clear only the democratically elected government of Israel has the authority to dispatch negotiators to sit with Palestinians and reach agreements," Sharon adviser Dore Gold said when asked about the upcoming talks in Washington.

"It is our hope that friendly countries around the world respect the democratic choices of the people of Israel and don't get drawn into our domestic politics," he added.

The architects of the Geneva deal, former Israeli justice minister Yossi Beilin and former Palestinian cabinet minister Yasser



Secretary of State Colin Powell (centre) at the Nato foreign ministers' meeting in Brussels.

Abed Rabbo, were in Washington lobbying for US support for the plan following its gala launch in Switzerland on Monday.

Officials have also raised the possibility of a meeting with Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, a leading advocate of Israel, but nothing has been officially scheduled.

Israel set itself up for further pressure from Washington by announcing plans to push ahead with another Jewish settlement expansion project on occupied land. Israel invited public bids on Thursday for 98-year leases of 13 plots of land designated for private home construction in West Bank's Ariel settlement.

The United States has already reduced Israel's \$9 billion in loan guarantees in protest at continued settlement building and construction of a vast barrier in the West Bank.

Representatives of 13 Palestinian factions — including the Hamas and Islamic Jihad, — have said that they would call a cease-fire if Israel reciprocated.

Reuters

West Asia peace not dead: Powell

Marrakesh (Morocco), Dec. 3
(Reuters): US secretary of state
Colin Powell said today the West
Asia peace "road map" was not
dead, but that he was open to
ideas like the unofficial peace
plan launched in Switzerland
earlier this week.

"The more we talk about
peace, the better. I welcome ideas
from whatever source," Powell
told a news conference in Mar-
rakesh during a three-nation
North African tour, when asked
about the symbolic Geneva Ac-
cord. "The road map is definitely
not dead — it's a living docu-
ment," he said, referring to the
US-backed plan to end three
years of violence between Is-
raelis and Palestinians.

The unofficial Geneva Ac-
cord was conceived by Israeli
Opposition Left-wingers and
Palestinian moderates after vio-
lence bereft of serious negotia-
tions even since the US launched
the road map in June.

"Our commitment remains
to the road map. It's the only real
plan out there that's been adopted by
parties," Powell said. "What we
need is commitment from the
Palestinian leadership... to fight
terrorism with more than
words."

W Asia factions meet in Cairo

Associated Press

CAIRO, Dec. 3. — Palestinian factions have begun talks with Egyptian officials aimed at achieving a cease-fire that could reopen peace talks with Israel, but militant groups have a broader goal — having a say in negotiations to end the decades-long conflict with the Jewish state.

It's one of the many twists and turns of West Asian politics: factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which do not officially recognise the existence of Israel, are laying the groundwork to be shadow negotiators along with the official delegates from the Palestinian Authority.

Representatives of Mr Yasser Arafat's mainstream Fatah movement and several radical PLO factions met here yesterday with Egyptian intelligence officials who are trying to mediate a cease-fire in attacks on Israeli civilians, in exchange for Israeli actions as well, including stopping targeted killings of militants and incursions into Palestinian territory.

The meetings are secret, but Mr Khalid Atta, a senior official of the Syrian-based Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, said the groups presented their views to the Egyptians, "who are opti-

mistic".

The main discussions will not begin until tomorrow with the arrival of delegates from Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the groups responsible for suicide bombing attacks that have killed hundreds of Israelis in the more than three years of the Palestinian uprising.

EU raps hawks: The EU ended two days of talks with Israel and its Arab neighbours today by mixing new pledges of economic and moral support for the troubled region with harsh words for Palestinian militants and hardline Israeli policies, a report adds from Naples.



Israeli schoolgirls are covered with foam during a civil defence exercise simulating terrorist and rocket attacks in a Jerusalem school on Wednesday. — AFP

THE STATESMAN

4 DEC 2004

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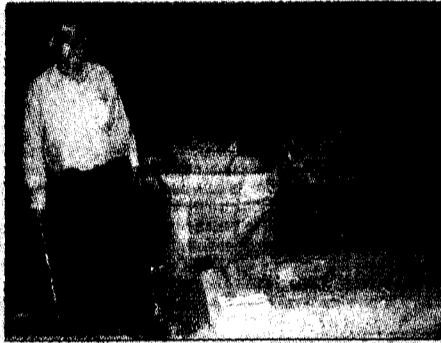
'I was given assurances that museums would be protected,' says expert

Pentagon warned of heritage loot, did nothing

GUY GUGLIOTTA
WASHINGTON, APRIL 14

IN the months leading up to the Iraq war, US scholars repeatedly urged the Defence Department to protect Iraq's priceless archaeological heritage from looters, and warned specifically that the National Museum of Antiquities was the single most important site in the country. Late in January, a mix of scholars, museum directors, art collectors and antiquities dealers asked for and were granted a meeting at the Pentagon to discuss their misgivings.

McGuire Gibson, an Iraq specialist at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute, told *The Washington Post* on Sunday that he went back twice more, and he and colleagues bombarded Defence Department officials with e-mail reminders in the weeks before the war began. "I thought I was given assurances that sites and museums would be protected," Gibson said. Instead, even with US forces firmly in control of Baghdad last week, looters breached the mu-



An employee at the Iraqi National Museum with an iron rod to protect it from looters

ing of ancient Sumer around 3,500 B.C. to the end of Islam's Abbasid Caliphate in 1258 A.D.

Asked on Sunday about the looting of the museum, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld blamed the chaos that ensues "when you go from a dictatorship" to a new order. "We didn't allow it. It happened," Rumsfeld said on NBC's *Meet the Press*. "There's a transition period, and no one is in control. There is still fighting in Baghdad. We don't allow bad things to happen. Bad things happen in life, and people do loot."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

15 APR 2003

UNOFFICIAL INITIATIVE BY FORMER PEACE NEGOTIATORS ■ UN, USA & EU HAIL MOVE

W Asia doves ink peace pact in Geneva

M. A. W. (12) SF 2/21/2

Associated Press

GENEVA, Dec. 1. — Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators today gathered to launch their unofficial initiative to end one of the world's most intractable conflicts in the presence of former US President Mr Jimmy Carter and other winners of the Nobel peace prize.

But the tightly guarded guest list, strong opposition from Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon and last-minute dissension within Palestinian ranks underscored the problems facing the plan that resulted from two years of secret negotiations.

"For the first time in more than a hundred years of conflict a detailed and comprehensive solution was agreed upon which settles the most critical issues of this con-

flict," the negotiators said in a statement.

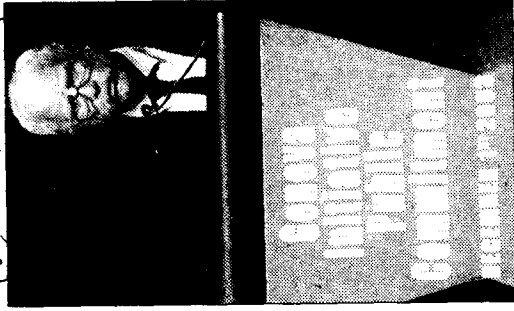
The unofficial treaty proposes:

- Borders between Israel and a future Palestinian state close to Israel's borders before the 1967 West Asia war, giving the Palestinians almost all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and part of Jerusalem.

- The removal of most Israeli settlements there and largely sidesteps the so-called "right of return" for Palestinians who fled or were driven out during the 1948-49 war that followed Israel's creation and their descendants.

- Divides sovereignty in Jerusalem.

The negotiators claim their work is in line with the US "road map" for peace and other plans. The US-backed "road map" spells out a formula for negotia-



Israelis raid Ramallah
The Israeli military launched a large-scale raid on the West Bank city of Ramallah early today, arresting dozens of Palestinians and blowing up at least one building, the army and Palestinian security officials said.

More than 60 tanks, jeeps and armored personnel carriers entered Ramallah after midnight, carrying out house-to-house searches across the city, Palestinian security officials said.

Palestinian witnesses said dozens of people were arrested, including a Hamas leader, Ghassan Abassi. Israeli military officials confirmed "a number" of arrests, and said they had uncovered an explosives laboratory. The army said the raid targeted the Hamas infrastructure in the Ramallah area, which it says is behind attacks that have killed more than 60 Israelis.



WAR AND PEACE: A Palestinian boy is carried away after he was wounded by Israeli soldiers during clashes in Ramallah on Monday. (Right) US actor Richard Dreyfus delivers a speech during the launching ceremony of the alternative West Asia peace plan in Geneva on Monday. — AFP

tions but leaves the trickiest issues open.

The Geneva plan has been welcomed by US Secretary of State Gen. Colin Powell, UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan and European leaders.

The EU foreign policy chief Mr Javier Solana today said that it fits in with overall peace efforts. "This initiative is very courageous," Mr Solana said.

"It offers solutions and parameters that can be used to find a final (peace) agreement," he said.

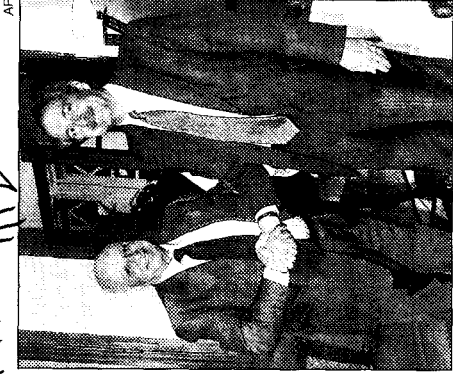
Korei meets Jordan king to revive peace talks

Amman: Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Korei and top US West Asia envoy William Burns held separate talks on Sunday with Jordan's King Abdullah II and senior aides on ways to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The meetings came as Abdullah was preparing to head for Washington on Wednesday for talks with US President George W. Bush that were to focus on the West Asia peace process and the situation in Iraq.

After a one-on-one Saturday night with Mr Korei at the US embassy in Amman, the premier's first meeting with a high-ranking US official since taking office, Mr Burns met on Sunday with Abdullah and Jordanian Prime Minister Faisal al-Fayez. "I have no illusions about the difficulties (but) it is very important for all of us to make maximum efforts," Mr Burns said as he emerged from his meeting with Mr Fayez and headed to the royal palace.

He reiterated that the US was determined to make all the necessary efforts to "move ahead on the basis of the roadmap" peace blueprint that stipulates the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel by 2005. Asked if his talks with Mr Korei and his visit



Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Korei (left) is greeted by US West Asia envoy William Burns prior to their meeting at the US embassy in Amman, Jordan, on Saturday.

to Israel later Sunday could pave the way for a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Mr Korei, Mr Burns said. "We are doing everything we can to encourage such contacts. Both sides must take advantage of the opportunities before us, both sides have obligations and responsibilities if we are going to make progress," Mr Burns said.

Mr Korei said, however, that "no date" had been set for a meeting with Mr Sharon, and insisted that the US should bear the brunt of the responsibility in reviving the peace process by putting pressure on Israel.

"We would like the US to put pressure on the Israeli government to stop the violations (it is committing) ... such as the (construction) of the separation wall, the settlements and the closures" of Palestinian land, he said. "There is nothing to stop the US from playing its role because it has interests in the region," Mr Korei said after talks with Mr Fayez. He later met Abdullah to discuss a series of

"ideas" on how to kickstart the peace process that the monarch could review with Mr Bush. AFP

11/27/03
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Palestinians dismiss Sharon's ultimatum

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, NOV. 29. With a new peace initiative round the corner, the Palestinian Authority appears to be in no hurry to respond to Thursday's threat by the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, that Israel could permanently hold some of the occupied territory unless the Palestinians moderated some of their demands.

Referring to the Palestinians, Mr. Sharon told a press conference on Thursday, "You do not have unlimited time," and added that if he felt that the Palestinians were not serious about a peace deal, he could take unilateral action. "Maybe, (the Palestinians) can get things now that they won't be able to get then," he said. The Palestinians were quick to reject Mr. Sharon's assertion. "This is an unprecedented, arrogant statement. It is rude and it lacks any vision," said the Palestinian Foreign Minister, Nabil Sha'ath. "He (Mr. Sharon)

should declare that he is committed to the road map and implement all the Israeli commitments that are in this map," he said.

Mr. Sharon also hinted that he might order people to withdraw from some isolated Jewish settlements. Netzarim, a heavily guarded area in Gaza, could be on the list for evacuation. Palestinian observers were, however, dismissive about such a move. Adam Shapiro, a leading peace activist of the pro-Palestinian, International Solidarity Movement told *The Hindu*, "Mr. Sharon has absolutely no desire to be caught in any kind of process that involves making peace, unless that peace means Israeli ascendancy and domination of land."

That he might be willing to give up a settlement in Gaza should be no surprise, for why would he continue to want Israelis to live in what is basically a small, outdoor prison camp?"

Mr. Sharon's exhortations seeking greater Pal-

estinian activism comes amid three key developments, which appear to be pushing the Israeli Government on to the defensive.

First, the U.S. administration has begun to show greater interest in the "track-II" Geneva initiative that will be formally unveiled in the Swiss city on Monday.

The U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, said on Thursday that he was willing to meet the authors of the Geneva Accords — the former Israeli minister and a key architect of the earlier Oslo accords, Yossi Beilin, and the former Palestinian Minister, Abed Rabbo.

Opposing this meeting, the Israeli President, Moshe Katsav, reportedly told Israel Radio that these talks, in case they materialise, could be interpreted as a sign of U.S. support for the unofficial peace plan.

The Geneva blueprint goes into details about the content of a final peace deal between the

Israelis and Palestinians and addresses tough questions such as the status of Jerusalem and the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return.

Second, the U.S. earlier this week, cut \$289.5 million from its \$9-billion loan guarantee to Israel to signal disapproval of the construction of Israeli settlements and plans to build a security barrier that intrudes into parts of Palestinian territory. Piqued by the U.S. move, Mr. Sharon said at the press conference that the construction of the security wall would be speeded up.

Third, internal opposition to Mr. Sharon's Palestinian policy has been growing in recent weeks. The Israeli Army Chief of Staff, Moshe Yaalon, publicly said recently that the Israeli approach towards Palestinians was counterproductive, while four former heads of the Israeli security service, Shin Beit, warned that the continuation of the existing policies was pushing Israel towards a "catastrophe".

BUSH IN BAGHDAD

WARR (C) A neocon job 5-8 2/11

VERILY, the banks of the Tigris are the ideal setting for the theatre that is the politics of the grand gesture. George W Bush's Thanksgiving Day arrival in Baghdad on Airforce One may not have been in the dead of night, but the effect of the presidential Boeing, windows blacked out, gliding in to land on what was till very recently Saddam's backyard could not have resounded louder. Agree with them or vehemently disagree, the neoconservatives reputed to have, to use an Americanism, 'Bush by the balls', have proven that their own too are made of steel. Look at what they set out to prove and accomplished. First, this first ever visit by a US President to Iraq — all three hours of it — comes barely a week after a DHL cargo plane took a direct hit as it was coming into land at the same airport. Bush and his minders were putting out the message that the President is willing to put his own body on the line for what he stands for. And that he wasn't just sending other people's children to die in the desert.

It takes some doing, this, putting the presidential body where the mouth is, given the Target Number 1 status George W enjoys on the list of every major global terrorist network. As for those who will claim, and there are, already, faint stirrings of a *sotto voce* campaign to the effect that given the massive security operation mounted by the 'paranoid' Americans Bush wasn't in any real danger, suffice it is to say — you can't have it both ways. Either the security situation in Iraq is as terrible as claimed or it isn't. Secondly, and at a time when the international community is slowly but surely heading towards some sort of compromise on Iraq, the neoconservatives have ensured that though the situation on the ground makes this *rapprochement* the only common sense approach to take, it will be on their terms.

Thanksgiving Day, after all, is a peculiarly American-Christian tradition that Middle America is plugged into like no other communal celebration save Christmas. And for the president to mark it with the guys and gals securing the homeland from terror while liberating the Iraqi people at the same time, is nothing if not an exhibition of that other central neocon thesis — 'the national interests of a great power transcend national boundaries.' That a concatenation of circumstances and the lunar calendar resulted in Thanksgiving falling the day after Id, the holiest day in the Islamic year, and provided Bush the opportunity, of carving the turkey in the heart of the Muslim world, was the perfect topping on the neocon cake. Thirdly, and this is no coincidence, Bush's Baghdad visit comes exactly a year before the American presidential elections and at a time when the US economy is sizzling along at a nine per cent rate of growth, the highest in 19 years. The only real worry for re-election strategists is the mounting casualty count in Iraq. But by being there and not being square, Bush has ensured that if concerted action with the cooperation of other powers brings down the daily death toll, he will be seen as the man who said — and believed — it would be worth sticking it out. Even if no such result obtains, he would have been there on the frontline seen standing for what he believes is the right thing to do. And that's not such a bad position for one of the most reviled American presidents in recent years to be in on the eve of his re-election bid.

Israel ready to cede land for peace

Tel Aviv, November 27

ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER Ariel Sharon said on Thursday that his country would be forced to make territorial concessions to Palestinians as part of future peace efforts.

Sharon's comments came amid new efforts to kick-start the stalled "road map" peace plan that envisions the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza by 2005.

"I spoke in the past about the need for painful concessions," Sharon said at a news conference. "It is clear that in the future we will not be in all the

places we are now."

Sharon had said earlier that he would take "unilateral steps" to ease tensions between Israel and the Palestinians should the sides fail to reach agreement. Israeli media reported Sharon was putting together a plan that would include dismantling some West Bank and Gaza Strip settlements.

Under repeated questioning on Thursday, Sharon refused to elaborate on what those unilateral steps "I don't want to go into more details," he said, saying the steps were meant to ease life for Israelis. "They will be important steps."

Sharon's press conference

came hours after another official said Israel was in the final stages of legalising new West Bank settlements, a violation of its commitments to the US and the road map. He appeared to confirm that some outposts would remain in place for security reasons.

"Whatever is illegal will be removed ... what is necessary will remain," he said.

The road map requires Israel to remove dozens of unauthorised West Bank outposts established since March 2001 and to freeze construction at existing settlements. Sharon's government has also pledged not to set up new settlements.

Sharon also warned Palestinians that time was running out for their efforts to negotiate territorial concessions with Israel.

"They don't have an unlimited amount of time," he said. "While I'm against setting artificial time frames, at the end of the time, there is a limit to our patience."

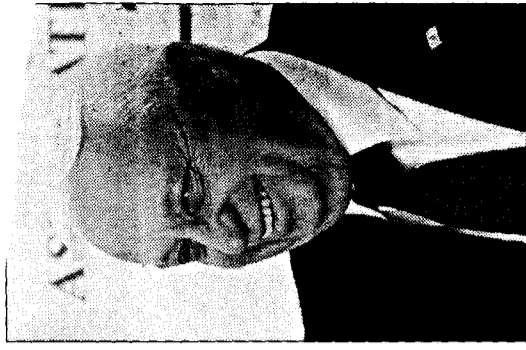
In place of a negotiated settlement, Israel could be forced to take unilateral steps, Sharon said. "The Palestinians should have understood by now that what they haven't gotten today they won't be given tomorrow," he said. He also accused the Palestinian government of failing to crack down on militant groups

as called for in the road map.

Palestinian militant groups plan to meet in Egypt next week with Palestinian officials in an effort to negotiate a voluntary agreement to end attacks against Israel. Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia says he then intends to take that agreement to Sharon to secure a cease-fire.

Sharon, a key architect of the settlement movement, refused to promise the residents of Netzarim, a particularly contentious settlement in Gaza, they would never be evacuated. "I don't mean to give any promises to anyone," he said.

AP



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon smiles during a press briefing in Tel Aviv on Thursday.

APF

28 NOV 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Turkish nightmares

The Istanbul attacks are aimed at driving Turkey to choices it need not make

ISTANBUL has once again been firmly placed at the crossroads. In carrying through a second round of attacks, terrorists have given ample notice of their capacity to strike at will, when and where they so resolve. Just days after targeting two synagogues in the city, they chose to zero in on two western symbols, a British consulate and an international bank. Certainly, the attacks, most probably by the Al-Qaeda and a fraternal organisation, are aimed at extending the terrain of the America-led war against terror. Equally, however, developments in Istanbul seem aimed at challenging Turkey's vision of its place in the world. They are clearly driven by a desire to shake the pillars of its unique syncretism.

Ever since Kemal Ataturk oversaw the country's passage to modernity, its leaders have constantly wrestled to meld different strands in domestic identity and foreign policy. Through Ataturk's summary rejection of tradition to the recent upsurge of political Islam, for instance, Turkey has consistently abided by a tolerance of different faiths and ideologies. It has manifested itself in many ways — for instance, in its current prime minister,

Recep Tayyip Erdogan's disavowal of old Islamist rhetoric for a more moderate moniker for himself, Muslim Democrat. The attack on synagogues threatens cultural co-existence in this meeting place between East and West, it is bound to put Turkey's minorities on edge, and it is intended to rock its strategic and defence ties with Israel. Similarly, attacks on British interests in the second round of explosions signify impatience with Turkey's membership of NATO as well as its intent to forge economic relations in the European Union.

In other words, the attacks seek to force Turkey into making choices it has always tried to banish — between political Islam and secular democracy, between Western and West Asian alliances. Many of these tensions came to the surface since the run-up to the war in Iraq, when Turkish territory was requested for an US-led invasion into northern Iraq and recently when domestic outrage made the government rethink its offer to contribute to the stabilisation force in post-Saddam Iraq. Intelligence agencies speak of fresh terror alerts. It's a threat that must be countered, both strategically and ideologically.

Palestinian factions agree to attend truce meet

Associated Press

JERUSALEM, Nov. 20. — Palestinian militant groups agreed to attend a truce conference in Cairo in 12 days, signaling willingness to halt violence in exchange for an Israeli promise to stop military operations, officials said today.

A truce is seen as key toward reviving the stalled road map plan, which envisions a Palestinian state by 2005.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Ahmed Qorei who took office last week, has made a cease-fire a top priority. He hopes to get the militants to halt attacks ahead of a cease-

fire with Israel, which would open the way to full-fledged peace talks.

Mr Qorei and Egyptian mediators met separately in the Gaza Strip yesterday with the leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the two groups responsible for more than 100 suicide bombings against Israelis in the past three years. The Egyptians remained in Gaza today for talks with leaders of the smaller factions.

Mr Qorei said the Cairo truce talks will begin on 2 December and representatives of all 13 factions are invited. Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other groups have already said they would attend. Nafez Azzam, an



PEACE OVERTURES: Palestinian Premier Mr Ahmed Qorei (left) with Hamas spiritual leader Sheik Ahmed Yassin in Gaza on Wednesday. — PTI

Islamic Jihad leader, said the group "will deal positively with any ideas that will serve the interests of our people". Hamas and Islamic Jihad, however, denied an Israeli

report that a cease-fire would go into effect by 15 December.

'UN resolution not binding' Israel does not feel bound by the UN Security Council's unanimous resolution on the "roadmap" for peace, Deputy Prime Minister Mr Ehud Olmert said today, adds AFP. "It is possible that we will hold talks with the new Palestinian government on the basis of the roadmap but... Israel does not feel bound by the resolution."

Despite objections from Israel, the UNSC yesterday voted unanimously for the Russian-backed resolution to put its stamp of approval on the plan.

Rocked in Istanbul, turkey in London

Protesters blame war for rise in suicide bombings

London, November 20

AROUND 100,000 protesters marched through London and tore down a mock statue of visiting US President George W. Bush on Thursday, many of them convinced his policies were to blame for anti-British bombs in Turkey. Demonstrators of all ages beat drums and blew whistles along a three-mile route that took them past Parliament and the end of Downing Street, where crowds paused to jeer toward Prime Minister Tony Blair's office.

When they reached Trafalgar Square, protesters felled a 20-foot papier mache statue of Bush in a parody of the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein when US and British troops swept into Baghdad. In its top pocket was a puppet with a grinning Blair face.

"Bush and Blair said they were fighting a war against terror to make the world a safer place for people," said Paul Burrows, 38, a university lecturer. "They haven't done that. Going out bombing people just gives them more reason to hate the West."

A large contingent of US expatriates, led by maimed Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic, led the march through the West End behind a banner declaring, "Proud of my country, ashamed of its President".

They were joined by hundreds of Britons, including schoolchildren who defied education authorities to take a day off for the protest, claimed an activist of the Stop The War Coalition, which organised the march along with the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Muslim Association of Britain.

The atmosphere at the beginning of the march was light-hearted, with many people singing and dancing down the street. Foghorns blared and whistles were blown as the crowd chanted anti-war slogans.

"The terrorist attacks are exactly the sort of thing we predicted would happen if they went into Iraq. They've proved us right," said Martin Smith, 64, a documentary film maker from Bristol in the west of England.

Alex Pummell, 28, said invading Iraq had greatly increased the risk of attack "and not just for us but for any country supporting British countries and organisations".

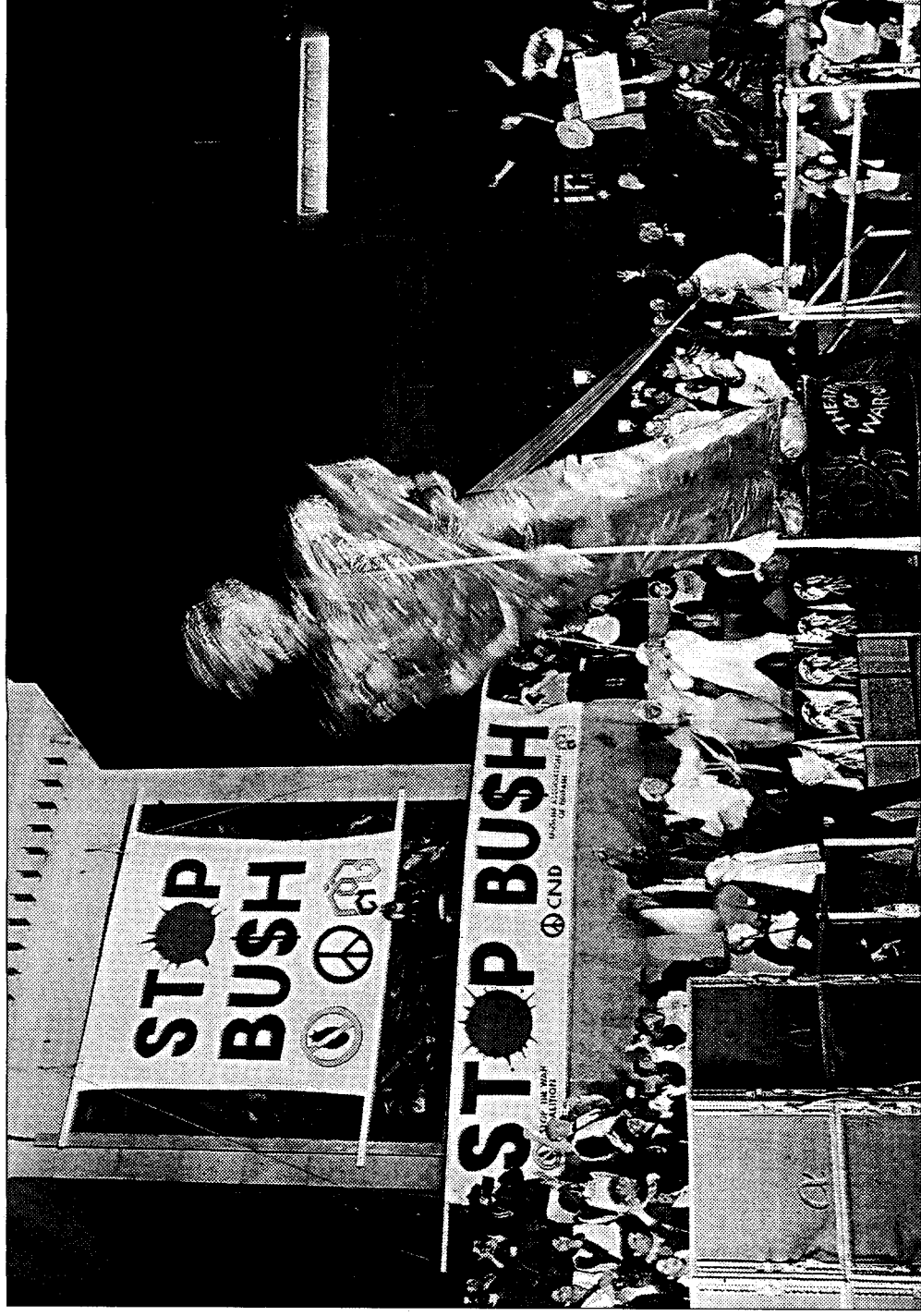
Police said earlier in the day they had spotted several known troublemakers among protesters, and that they had made 50 arrests linked to the visit since Bush arrived.

"A number of well-known faces are about and we won't be at all surprised if they try some sort of concerted action later today," said Deputy Assistant Police Commissioner Andy Trotter. All police leave has been cancelled for the duration of Bush's visit and officers were out in force.

Earlier on Thursday, President Bush, who is on a three-day visit to Britain, laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey before holding talks with Blair at No 10 Downing Street and addressing a joint press conference at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

"A number of the ones that cause real problems don't march at all, they may lurk around in central London waiting to cause problems later in the day." A series of small demonstrations had culminated on Wednesday night in a mass gathering outside the Buckingham Palace. Police made 31 arrests on minor offences. Around 1,500 protesters gathered outside the Palace during a state banquet hosted by the Queen for Bush. The protesters, many of them dressed either as Bush or Blair, blew horns, banged drums and played loud music.

Reuters



THE GREAT FALL: Anti-Bush protesters topple a statue of US President George W. Bush in London on Thursday.

Big Two united in grief & terror war

The Guardian and Reuters London, November 20

GEORGE W. Bush and Tony Blair vowed no retreat from the war on terrorism or their occupation of Iraq on Thursday after bombers struck British targets in Turkey during the US President's visit to Britain.

The blasts in Istanbul hit the British consulate and the office of Britain's largest bank HSBC, killing 26 people including the British consul general and casting a pall over the historic first ever state visit by a US President to Washington's closest ally.

Bush's entourage was speeding toward London's Westminster Abbey for a solemn wreath-laying ceremony as the first pictures of bodies and mangled

holding back, no compromise. It should not lessen in any way our commitment to Iraq. On the contrary, it shows how important it is to carry on until terrorism is defeated there as well."

Following hour-long talks at No 10 Downing Street, overshadowed by the blasts in Istanbul, the two sombre-looking leaders emerged soon after midday to give a press briefing.

Blair extended his sympathies to the families of those who had died in the two huge suicide bombings, many of whom are likely to be British. Blair continued: "We must affirm that there must be no holding back, no compromise, no hesitation in confronting this menace, in attacking it wherever and whenever we can and in defeating it utterly."

Blair said: "Once again, we must affirm that in the face of this terrorism there must be no

White House evacuated after false alarm

A FALSE alarm attributed to a wrong radar reading, which indicated a plane was flying above the White House, resulted in the partial evacuation of the building and alerted the North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD) on Thursday.

William Schumann, Federal

PTI, Washington

wreckage on the streets of Istanbul and it is necessary, and no act of thugs or killers will change our resolve or alter their fate."

Blair said: "Once again, we must affirm that in the face of this terrorism there must be no

Iraq strikes kill 16, US for more troops

Baghdad/London, November 20

A SERIES of blasts rocked Iraq on Thursday killing at least 16 people, including two children.

A car bomb killed 12 civilians in Kirkuk in an explosion aimed at the headquarters compound of a leading Kurdish political party, an American military official said on Thursday.

Most of the blast was absorbed by the perimeter wall of the compound, which houses the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, and the car bomb was not able to get close enough to the building to cause significant damage, the official, from the coalition joint task force, said.

The patriotic union is a group that supports the American presence in Iraq, and the party's chief, Jalal Talabani, is the current head of the American-installed Iraqi Governing Council.

In another attack on Thursday, gunmen opened fire before dawn outside the Jordanian Embassy in Baghdad, killing an Iraqi security guard.

There were also reports on Thursday that the body of a pro-US politician on a local council had been found in Basra on Wednesday after he was abducted on Tuesday.

A separate bombing was reported in Ramadi on Thursday. Local witnesses said that a car bomb struck the offices of a United States-appointed local council, killing 2 people and wounding 11. But United States Central Command officials and a military spokesman in Baghdad said they had no confirmation.

Meanwhile, President Bush said on Thursday he could increase the number of US troops in Iraq, a statement that contrasts with Pentagon plans to reduce deployment ahead of the 2004 US presidential election. Bush promised to "finish the job we have begun" in Iraq. In a joint statement,

The New York Times

UK consul dies in Turkey blast

26 KILLED; AL-QAIDA CLAIMS HAND IN STRIKES

AP & Reuters
Istanbul, November 20

BACK-TO-BACK explosions hit offices of the London-based HSBC bank and the British consulate in Istanbul on Thursday, killing the consul general and at least 25 others and wounding about 400.

The blasts, which coincided with US President George Bush's state visit to Britain, came days after Istanbul was hit by two synagogue bombings.

Asked whether British consul general Roger Short was dead, the consulate's chaplain Ian Sherwood replied: "He is". The building where Short was working — an annexe near the main gate, where he had temporarily set up office while the main building was being renovated — was completely destroyed.

The attackers blew up explosive-laden pick-up trucks in the bombings, the Istanbul Governor's office said. A caller to



A woman injured in the blast at the HSBC office in Istanbul being taken away for treatment on Thursday.

urday. Turkish police said they did not believe the Turkish group, known as the Islamic Great Eastern Raiders Front (IBDA-C), could have carried out either the Saturday or Thursday blasts.

In Iraq, a series of blasts killed at least eight people since Wednesday night. A suicide car bomber killed at least 12 civilians in an attack near the offices of a leading Kurdish party in Kirkuk, northern Iraq, on Thursday, hours after two others were killed in a car bombing west of Baghdad in Ramadi. Two children were killed and two wounded when an explosion ripped through a classroom near Karbala. Pools of blood smeared the classroom floor.

In London, President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair stood united on the war on terror and condemned the bombings in Turkey.

Related reports on Page 15

Qaida and a small Turkish Islamist group. Both groups had claimed responsibility for the two blasts in the name of al-synagogue blasts last Sat-

Turkey films bomber

Fr 4
18/11
H. Aksu (u)

Istanbul, Nov. 17 (Reuters): A suicide bomber was caught on film an instant before devastating synagogue blasts in Istanbul, Turkish authorities said today and the owner of a vehicle used in the attacks was in custody.

Financial markets from Tokyo to New York dipped after claims that Osama bin Laden's al Qaida network carried out what Turkey said was an attack masterminded abroad. Turkish shares also ended down, but debt prices and the lira currency held steady.

An Arabic newspaper said a unit of al Qaida had claimed responsibility and pledged more strikes against Western states, specifically the US and its allies Britain, Italy, Australia and Japan. Interior minister Abdulkadir Aksu said Saturday's attacks on two Istanbul synagogues, which killed 24 people and wounded 300, were the work of a "foreign source".

"There is no organisation in Turkey that could have carried this out by itself," he told the Vatan newspaper. Aksu said one of the bombers, at the Neve Shalom synagogue, could be discerned in his vehicle on security film shot before the blast. "But it's not clear. We're trying to clarify and make an identification," he said.

Asked if there was anyone else in the vehicles and whether these were suicide bombings, Aksu said: "Yes, yes, these were definitely (suicide attacks)... They were both alone." Istanbul governor Muammer Guler said investigations into the blasts were advancing and "important clues" had been uncovered. "Don't worry. Our police will overcome this," Guler said.

Each vehicle in the blasts was packed with 400 kg of explosives and two corpses were found with wires attached to them suggesting they might be suicide bombers.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan said after chairing a lengthy cabinet meeting on the crisis that pieces of skin believed to belong to the suicide bombers had been recovered and sent for DNA tests to help identify the culprits.

Aksu said the bombs, made of ammonium sulphate, nitrate and petrol, all easily available, were mixed in plastic containers.

"The bombs were made in Turkey," Aksu said.

Turkey probes Al-Qaeda role

ISTANBUL, NOV. 17. Turkish officials were investigating claims that the Al-Qaeda terrorist network was behind the bomb blasts outside two Istanbul synagogues that killed 24 people, the Prime Minister said on Monday.

Two Arabic-language newspapers received separate statements on Sunday claiming Osama bin Laden's group was responsible for Saturday's bombings, which Turkish officials said were the work of suicide bombers who set off pickup trucks packed with explosives.

There was no way to independently confirm the authenticity of the claims.

"Our security teams, our intelligence services have to work to determine the extent of truth of the claims," the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, told reporters.

Istanbul's Governor, Muammer Guler, said more people had been detained in connection with the attacks, according to private Turk NTV.

"It is not yet definite whether the attackers were Arabs," NTV quoted Mr. Guler as saying. "But we have important information. Be patient."

Meanwhile, in a separate probe, police in Istanbul arrested five Kurdish militants, including a pair who allegedly were planning a suicide strike on a police station in the city, Turkey's semiofficial news agency Anatolia reported Monday, without saying when the arrests were made.

On Sunday, the Interior Min-

Turkish Islamic militant group, saying it did not have the capacity to launch the so-called attacks. "It is very likely that there is an international connection. We are not ruling out any possibility, including Al-Qaeda involvement."

A Turkish intelligence official said the attacks were suicide bombings. He said Turkish security forces had been expecting a suicide strike but said it was very difficult to prevent such an action.

Turkish newspaper reports on Monday said that four Turks who were questioned and released on Sunday included some who allegedly provided fake passports to three Al-Qaeda suspects captured in Turkey last year as they illegally entered from Iran.

The London-based weekly *Al-Majalla* received an e-mailed responsibility claim that said the Al-Qaeda carried out the Istanbul attacks, as well as the Nov. 12 car bomb attack outside the Italian police headquarters in Nasiriyah, Iraq that killed 19 Italians and more than a dozen Iraqis.

One of the e-mailed statements warned of further attacks and demanded that the United States release Arab prisoners held at Guantanamo in Cuba. It also warned the U.S. President, George W. Bush, that attacks would be directed at the United States itself. "There is more to come. By God, the Jews of the world will regret that their (men) thought of invading the lands of Muslims," the statement said. — AP



Carabinieri stand in front of the bunches of flowers on the steps of the Unknown Soldier Monument in Rome, on Monday. A funeral chamber has been set up for the 19 Italians killed last week during a bomb attack in Nasiriyah, southern Iraq. — AFP

ister, Abdulkadir Aksu, said the links and discredited earlier attacks likely had international claims of responsibility by a tiny

GOVT BLAMES FOREIGN ULTRAS ✓

Israel minister visits Turkey

Associated Press

ISTANBUL, Nov. 16. — Turkish and Israeli investigators today probed the bombings of two synagogues, whose death toll rose to 23 with the discovery of three more bodies.

Israeli foreign minister Mr Silvan Shalom flew to Istanbul to show solidarity to the small Jewish community in this predominantly Muslim nation that is an ally of Israel. Flanked by Istanbul's chief rabbi, Isak Haleva, who was among the more than 300 wounded in yesterday's twin attacks, Mr Shalom laid a wreath in the rubble outside one of the two synagogues. Turks, kept behind security barriers by police, threw down white carnations in a sign of condolence.

Private NTV Turkish television said intelligence officials reportedly were questioning three people, including two women, about the bombings, which authorities suspected could be the work of international terrorists, possibly the Al-Qaida.

Authorities were skeptical about a Turkish radical Islamic group's claim that it carried out the bombings, questioning whether it was capable of carrying out such carefully coordinated attacks.

Turkish officials said intelli-

FALL OUT

- Israel has sounded a high alert at all its overseas missions following the dual terrorist bombings outside two Istanbul synagogues and asked its security agencies to conduct a probe into the attack.
- Pakistan has put its security services on red alert after intelligence reports warned that it could be the next target for attacks by international terrorists.

gence suggested Al-Qaida may have been planning attacks in Turkey. "We were informed that both vehicles paused and exploded in front of the synagogues," Turkey's foreign minister Mr Abdullah Gul said. The drivers of the vehicles were believed to be at the wheels at the time of the blasts, he added.

Turkey's Prime Minister Mr Recep Tayyip Erdogan said; "This incident has moved beyond the national dimension, I believe, to the international."

India shocked: India today expressed shock over the ghastly terrorist acts outside two synagogues in Istanbul yesterday claiming innocent lives and said such acts cannot be a justification for any cause, PTI adds from Damascus.

Blasts at synagogues kill 23

Terror strikes Turkey

501
167

Ararat
Turkey

AGENCIES

ISTANBUL, Nov. 15. — Twin car bomb blasts outside synagogues in Istanbul during Sabbath prayers today killed 23 people and wounded more than 277. Turkey, Nato's only Muslim member and a US ally, has long had military and political ties with Israel. It was the first Muslim country to recognise Israel in 1948.

Interior minister Abdulkadir Aksu said police were investigating whether they were suicide bombings or blasts triggered by timers or remote control devices. Footage from security cameras showed a red Fiat exploding in front of Neve Shalom after the driver walked away. Great Eastern Islamic Raiders' Front, a Turkish group, claimed responsibility for the blasts, but police suspect the attack was "too sophisticated" for

them to carry out; there were also reports that the Al-Qaida wanted to target Turkey.

There were "international connections" to the near-simultaneous attacks, foreign minister Abdullah Gul said. One of the blasts hit Istanbul's largest synagogue, Neve Shalom, where hundreds had gathered for a Bar Mitzvah ceremony. The other bomb exploded at Beth Israel synagogue, five km away.



A TV grab of a blast victim. — AFP

"To do something like this when people are praying —

this is truly beyond the pale of human conduct. Even animals don't commit evil like this," said Neve Shalom chief Rabbi Isak Haleva, who was among the injured. Mr Raanan Gissin, adviser to the Israeli Prime Minister, said: "This wasn't just an attack against Jews. This is radical Islamic terrorism against humanity."

■ Photograph on page 11

■ Blasts rock synagogues in Istanbul, kill at least 24

AVLA JEAN YACKLEY
ISTANBUL | NOVEMBER 15

UP TO 24 people were killed and 146 wounded on Saturday, when car bombs shattered two Istanbul synagogues as worshippers celebrated the Sabbath, officials said.

Turkish Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu said he could not rule out the possible involvement of Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda, which has been blamed for attacks on other Jewish targets in the past 18 months.

In a televised statement, Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul said he believed there were "international links" in two bomb attacks which ripped through two synagogues in Istanbul on Saturday. "It is clear that this is a terrorist event with international links," Gul said. He added that he believed suicide attackers were behind the two blasts. "This is the first time we have seen such blasts. We believe they were caused by suicide attackers," Gul said in televised remarks.

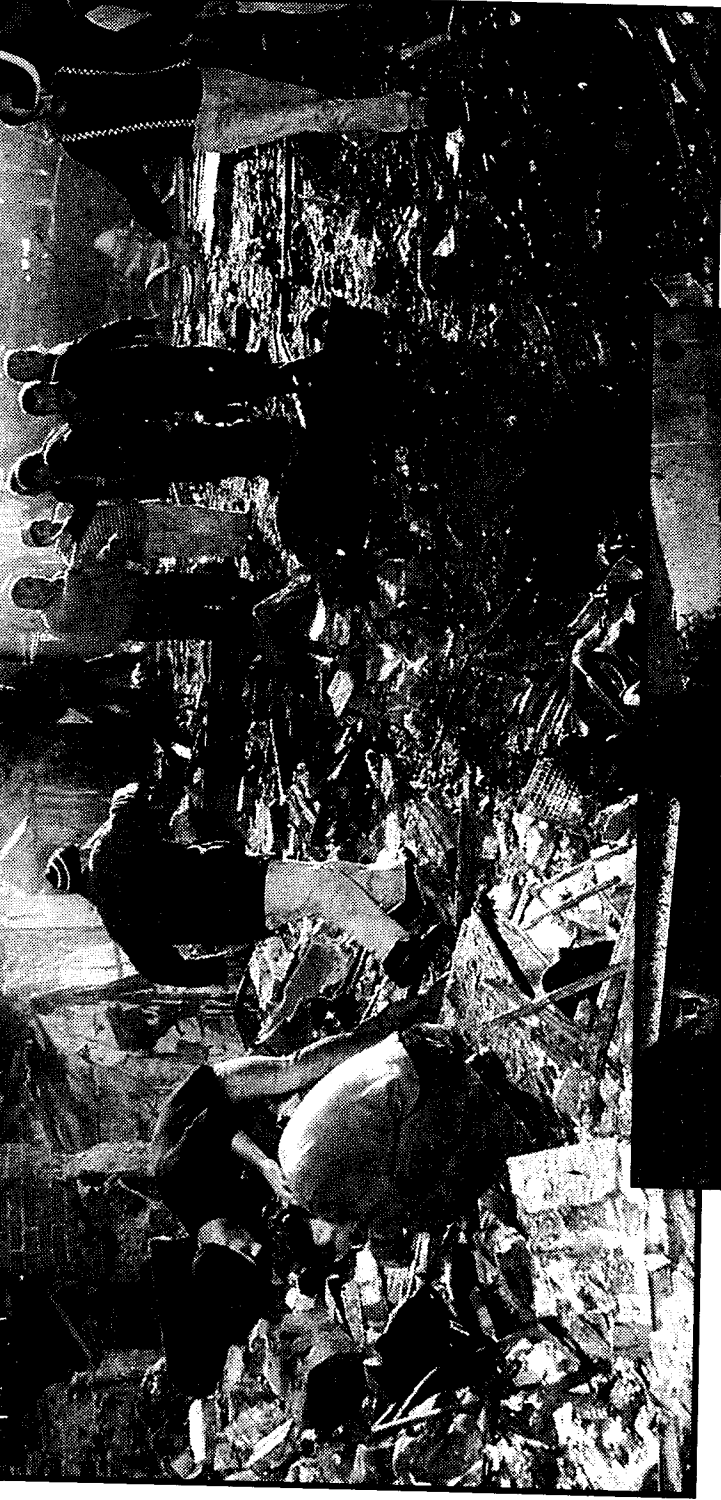
"There were two simultaneous attacks at two central synagogues, the main synagogue Neve Shalom and another large synagogue, Sisi," Amira Arnon, Israel's Consul General to Turkey told Israel Army radio. Aksu put the death toll at 15, with 146 injured, but police officers at the scene said as many as 24 had died. Israel denounced the blasts as "criminal terror attacks".

The Chief Rabbi of

'There were two simultaneous attacks at two synagogues, the main synagogue Neve Shalom and another synagogue, Sisi,' says Amira Arnon, Israeli Consul General in Turkey

Turkey, Yitzhak Haleva, told Israel Radio: "I was praying when suddenly there was an explosion under us and all the windows blew open." He said his son had been hurt in the blast at the syna-

Terror hits Turkey



gogue in the Sisi district, named by Israel Radio as Beit Israel, and was undergoing an operation in hospital.

At the central Neve Shalom synagogue, the

"We suspect car bombs caused both explosions," said Kadir Topbas, head of a local council in which one of the synagogues was based. A radical Turkish Islamist group known as IBDA/C —

Rescuers look for survivors (above); a medic checks a victim's pulse outside the Neve Shalom synagogue in Istanbul on Saturday

the Islamic Great Eastern Raiders/Front — claimed responsibility in a call to Turkey's semi-official Anadolu news agency. Yitzhak Bibas told Israel Radio he was among about 300 people at the Sisi synagogue attending Sabbath prayers and suggested that the worst of the casualties may have been among passers-by.

Jewish sites have been targeted in recent attacks blamed on militants linked to Al Qaeda — notably in Casablanca in May and a Tunisian synagogue bombed in April 2002.

"There is a high chance of sabotage (in these blasts)," CNN Turk television quoted Interior Minister Aksu as saying. — Reuters

Palestinians approve Qorei Cabinet

Associated Press

RAMALLAH, Nov. 12. — Palestinian lawmakers today approved Prime Minister Mr Ahmed Qorei's new government, setting the stage for a renewed push to implement the stalled, US-backed "road map" peace plan.

The vote came after Palestinian leader Mr Yasser Arafat — who appears to have survived the Israeli-US effort to sideline him — joined Mr Qorei in calling for an end to three years of violence with Israel that has claimed thousands of lives.

"The time has come between us and you Israelis... to get out of this cycle of destructive war," Mr Arafat said, referring to the violence that broke out in September 2000 and buried an ambitious effort to end a century of Arab-Israeli enmity.

Israeli officials said they would give the new Premier a chance to restore calm, and Islamic militant groups said they will consider a cease-fire. Israeli and Palestinian officials said they expected a meeting to take place soon between Mr Qorei and Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon.



THE LEADER SPEAKS: Palestinian Prime Minister (left) listens in silence as Mr Yasser Arafat shows a UN document about Israeli separation wall being built around the West Bank during a session of the Palestinian parliament in Ramallah on Wednesday. — AFP

The approval of the new Cabinet, which was sworn in this evening, ended a two-month Palestinian political stalemate that stymied efforts to implement the road map plan which the sides accepted six months ago.

Mr Qorei broke a stand-off on Sunday by giving in to Mr Arafat on the crucial question of who controls Palestinian security and police, leaving the veteran leader effectively in charge of most of the forces.

The Palestinian parliament approved the Cabinet by a vote of 48-13 with five abstentions, despite criticism within the legislature

of the government's make-up. Some Palestinian lawmakers had complained that the Cabinet was too similar to previous governments that have been tainted by corruption.

Israel and the USA have accused the Palestinian leader of stoking terrorism and wanted the security agencies removed from his jurisdiction. In September, Israel issued a declaration that it would act to "remove" Mr Arafat.

But today, there appeared to be signs of a shift, with Israeli officials suggesting they were primarily interested in restoring peace with the Palestinians.

Arafat wins in cabinet deal

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Ramallah, Nov. 9 (Reuters): Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie today announced a deal to form a new government that would keep security powers key to a US-backed peace plan under President Yasser Arafat's thumb.

Qurie said his candidate for interior minister, pro-reform General Nasser Yousef, would not hold a cabinet post.

Instead, Arafat loyalist Hakam Balawi would get the job and oversee police, civil defence and the preventive security service.

The five other Palestinian security services would be overseen by a national council chaired by Arafat, accused by Israel and the US of fomenting violence in a three-year-old uprising — an allegation he denies.

Qurie said the Palestinian

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parliament would convene on Wednesday for a confidence vote in the government, ending a month-long impasse with Arafat on its formation.

Israel, which had hoped to sideline Arafat, 74, an icon of Palestinian nationalism, was unimpressed by the deal and division of security powers.

"This is probably a sad day for democracy and democratic reforms in the Palestinian Authority because we still see that the cartel of terror headed by Arafat is the body that calls the shots when it comes to security," said Raanan Gissin, a spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Qurie and Sharon have expressed willingness to discuss reviving the US-backed "road map" to peace once the Palestinian legislature approves the cabinet.

Korei, Arafat reach security deal

Ramallah, November 8

PALESTINIAN PRIME Minister Ahmed Korei on Saturday said that President Yasser Arafat had agreed to a security deal that would split power between the interior ministry and the national security council.

Korei had proposed that Hakam Balawi, favoured by Arafat's Fatah faction for interior minister, cede control over Palestinian security forces to the council.

The council is under Arafat's auspices but includes General Nasser Yousef, Korei's original choice for interior minister.

"The interior minister will most likely be Hakam Balawi, with responsibility for administrative affairs while security issues will be conducted by the national security council headed by Arafat," Qurie told reporters after meeting Arafat in the West Bank city of Ramallah Saturday.

The Korei-Arafat spat had held up formation of a permanent Palestinian government after the 30-day mandate of an emergency cabinet expired this week.

Reuters

Sharon's Shockwaves

EU votes Israel as major threat to world peace

'Racist', 'flight of fantasy', 'anti-Semitic' — these are the Israeli reactions to a survey which showed some 59 per cent of European Union citizens see the Jewish state as the biggest threat to world peace. An angry Tel Aviv has even offered to send a bombed out bus to European cities to demonstrate the kind of terrorism that it faces daily. Dramatics apart, the survey is proof that not everybody shares Washington's enthusiasm for Israel's policies, particularly those adopted by the Ariel Sharon regime. Uncaring of international opprobrium, Mr Sharon has launched an all-out offensive on the Palestinians, the response to which has been a spate of suicide bombings. Coming in the backdrop of Israel's attacks on Syria and now hostilities on the Lebanon border, the survey can only deepen fissures between Washington and the Europeans, particularly the Germans and French who have refused to go along with the Bush administration on the Iraqi misadventure. Time and again, the EU has expressed its disquiet at Mr Sharon's iron-fisted approach to the Palestinian problem and urged restraint. Of course, with Washington's backing, Mr Sharon has disdainfully ignored such wise counsel.

Tempting as it might be to condemn the survey as anti-Semitic, in reality, it is more a reflection of Europe's deep discomfiture with Tel Aviv's aggressive policies and its neglect of human rights and international law. Many European countries have sizeable Muslim populations, and barring minor glitches, they co-exist peacefully with the locals. Washington should take the sentiments of the Europeans seriously, if it ever hopes to get them on board its global coalition against terrorism. Jihadism has taken root among the once secular and peaceful Palestinians, thanks to Israel's aggressive incursions into Palestinian territory and its indiscriminate killings of civilians. The import of the survey should not be lost on New Delhi which has, of late, been uncritical of Israel's actions against the Palestinians. The theory that a hardline approach will prevail in the fight against terrorism is specious. More Israeli lives have been lost after Mr Sharon adopted an uncompromising approach. The EU survey results are a ringing assertion that the fight against terrorism cannot be selective; all actions which contribute to it have to be challenged.

DRAFT ON CHILD VICTIMS OF TERROR

Israel to table first-ever UN resolution

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AFP & AP

JERUSALEM, Nov. 5. — Israel plans to file a resolution to the UN General Assembly on child victims of Palestinian attacks.

In an unprecedented move which could herald new tactics toward the world body, which Tel-Aviv accuses of bias, a senior Israeli official today said: "We put a new resolution on the table a few days ago dealing with the effects of Palestinian terror on Israeli children."

Mr Daniel Meron, the director-general of the Israeli foreign ministry's department in charge of the UN and international organisations, added: "Enough is enough. Talking about every event in West Asia as if things were one-sided is wrong." He explained that the UN had adopted resolutions dealing separately with the suffering of Palestinians for two years running.

The resolution is currently being examined by UN committees and was expected to be officially submitted within three weeks, he added.

Israel has been the target of countless resolutions by the UN General Assembly condemning its actions in the Palestinian territories, but has so far chosen to ignore them and dismissed the world body as biased.

In another development, Israeli defence officials today said they had begun easing travel restrictions in the West Bank and were discussing the removal of unauthorised settlement outposts. But Palestinians said little

had changed on the ground and that Israel had even confiscated some Palestinian land in the West Bank.

Israeli forces have been encircling main Palestinian population centres

to Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Ahmed Qorei, the Israeli army said closures were being lifted around all West Bank Palestinian towns except Jenin and Nablus. The two areas have been centres of Palestinian militant activity, and an army spokesman said the military had received numerous warnings about threat in Nablus.

An army spokesman said the lifting of the restrictions was being carried out in steps. "I can assure you that people are feeling this (improvement) as we speak," the spokesman said.

Meanwhile, chief Palestinian negotiator Mr Saeb Erekat said the Israeli army had approved the seizure of Palestinian farmland in the Jordan Valley, not far from the Israel-West Bank border. The army, he said, planned to use the land for a security barrier that Israel is building, ostensibly to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel. The army did not immediately comment.

USA cautions Israel

The USA has opposed the Israeli fence dividing Palestine and Israel, saying it "believed" that Israel did not need the fence and warned it may reduce Israeli loan guarantees on the issue, PTI adds from Washington.

A State Department spokesman yesterday said the Bush Administration "does not believe" Israel needs the security fence and repeated the US decision to reduce loan guarantees to Israel on the issue as mandated by Congress.

Cabinet crisis



RAMALLAH, Nov. 5. — Mr Yasser Arafat delayed the formation of a new Palestinian Cabinet yesterday by blocking his Prime Minister's choice for security chief, in turn holding up fledgling efforts to restart peace talks with Israel after a three-month freeze in contacts, officials said. Mr Qorei has assigned all Cabinet portfolios, with the exception of that of an interior minister, who would control the security forces, the officials said. Mr Qorei met Mr Arafat, but failed to resolve the dispute over the post. Underlying the argument is Mr Arafat's refusal to relinquish control over some of the security services. — AP

for two months, banning most travel. The crack-down, a reaction to suicide bombing attacks inside Israel, has further stifled the battered Palestinian economy.

In an apparent gesture

THE STATESMAN

6 NOV 2003

6 NOV 2003

Headscarf of faith and mantle of reform

Turkey's Islamist Prime Minister blurs stereotypes with his liberal policies, reports SUNA ERDEM

WHEN Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish Prime Minister, paid his respects last week to Kemal Ataturk, the strongly secular founder of modern Turkey, the former Islamist firebrand represented both Ataturk's legacy and a religious devotion that he hated.

Erdogan, visiting Ataturk's mausoleum in Ankara to mark the 80th anniversary of the republic last Wednesday, is almost one year into what many feel to be the most reformist, pro-Western government that Turkey has had since it came into existence.

Yet, Erdogan's conservative religious credentials were also on display. He broke a traditional Ramadan fast with a poor family in Ankara and was applauded for his call on businessmen to shun expensive Ramadan *iftar* feasts and to help the poor instead.

He then confined himself to soft drinks at a reception hosted by President Sezer, one from which Erdogan's wife was controversially excluded because she wears the Islamic headscarf, abhorred by staunch secularists and, indeed, by Ataturk himself.

It is probably no surprise to Erdogan's detractors that under his tenure the Turkish republic is celebrating a birthday dominated by the divisive headscarf issue. Several MPs from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK) boycotted the reception because Sezer invited them without their wives. Social Democrat opposition MPs attended with their spouses, by invitation.

Sezer has thrown down the gauntlet to the AK, saying that people must be partisan if it means safeguarding the values of the republic. Erdogan has not picked up the gauntlet. He simply told his Cabinet to attend, left his MPs free to do as they wished and declared the argument closed, a move that made the secularists, rather than the devout, look like the panicked ideologues.

After the government's year in office, many Turkish and foreign commentators accept that its actions - pushing through key European Union harmonisation reforms, keeping the shaky economy in check and reducing the role of the powerful military - have begun to weigh more heavily than its historic legacy as Turkey's political Islamic movement, which was abandoned two years ago.



Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan with his Azerbaijani counterpart, Ilham Aliyev (right), in Ankara. — AFP

"In Europe, they see this as the most liberal government in 80 years," said Taha Akyol, a respected broadcaster and columnist. "AK has taken many decisive steps ... It has moved away from Islamism and become a centre-right party."

Since Erdogan's fledgling party came to power last November in a landslide election, he has been cannily quoting Ataturk at every turn, particularly his aim for Turkey to reach a state of "modern civilisation".

Through a series of difficult legal reforms that ushered in greater human rights and reduced the role of the powerful military in politics, he has taken his country closer than ever to the national dream of joining the EU - an aim that even the status quo-loving

military admits that Ataturk would have set for himself.

One reason why AK has been so keen on reform, EU related or otherwise, is that it was voted in by the religious and non-religious masses who have had enough of corrupt, authoritarian rule by squabbling coalitions and the bureaucratic establishment.

Erdogan has first-hand knowledge about restrictions on the freedom of expression, having been imprisoned for reading out a poem with Islamist-military undertones.

The need to be seen weeding out corruption has also served him well, as it provided an opportunity to pursue the business empire of the controversial Uzan family whose son, Cem, is a political opponent.

Despite deep suspicions among the secularist elite, AK and its supporters are slowly becoming entrenched, leading to subtle social changes, such as the rise of an "Islamist bourgeoisie" and shifts in attitude that include a more open debate on the military's role.

AK rule has been far from perfect. By recently trying to include Koranic schools in the mainstream of education, it has raised secularist hackles, even in quarters that it had won over.

Implementing reforms has been difficult, as judges stick to defunct laws and old-school bureaucrats create obstacles. The start of one course in the once-banned Kurdish language was delayed because the door to the classroom was deemed to be too short.

The slow pace of change is likely to be criticised in a European Commission report to be published any day now. There are also big foreign policy problems. Relations with the USA, a Nato ally, were badly strained after the Parliament refused to let US troops use its soil in the Iraq war.

Perhaps the biggest stumbling block, though, is Cyprus. AK has so far failed to soften the hard line of the Turkish Cypriot leadership and the Turkish military towards any compromise with the internationally recognised Greek Cypriots. If the issue is unresolved by the time that Cyprus - in effect, the southern, Greek part - joins the EU next year, it will be a barrier to Turkey's own accession hopes.

— *The Times, London.*

West Asia: Towards a two-state solution

By Chinmaya R. Gharekhan

IN THESE dark, dismal and dangerous days in West Asia, it sounds unrealistic to even talk about a dialogue, let alone prospects for peace. Yet it was precisely that the Department of Public Information, United Nations, organised an international seminar on peace in the Middle East under the title: "Towards a Two-State Solution", on October 21 and 22. The seminar was appropriately held in Seville, capital of the Andalusian region of Spain, where three cultures — Jewish, Christian and Islamic — co-existed for over 700 years from the 7th century. It brought together high-level Israeli and Palestinian representatives as well as the media from about 15 countries. The Government of Israel was not represented; it has been boycotting such events for the simple reason that they are organised by the U.N., which is perceived by Israel as anti-Israel, forgetting that Israel owes its legitimacy to the world organisation.

Official Israeli non-participation meant that the meeting became largely a dialogue among believers in a two-state solution based on Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397 which, to all participants, meant the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. The prevalence of this consensus, however, did not render the discussions dull. Nabil Shaath, Foreign Minister, Ghassan Khatib, a former Minister, and Ahmad Soboh represented the Palestinian side. The Israeli side was equally impressive: Avraham Burg, former Knesset speaker, Shlomo Ben Ami,

former Foreign Minister, Daniel Ben Simon, columnist of the leading daily, *Haaretz*. The U.N. was represented by Shashi Tharoor, Under Secretary General in-charge of DPI, and Terje Larsen, Special Coordinator for Middle East peace process. The statements of the Israelis, perhaps because they are

give and take. As for the road map, which was the reason for the seminar, there was scepticism. However, Ambassador Moratinos, who was the European Union's special envoy for the Middle East until July this year, made a strong case in support of the road map. He pointed out the road map

agreement, said that it was not realistic to expect the Palestinians to fight a civil war with their brethren in Hamas and Jihad unless they knew beforehand what they would be fighting for. In other words, the Palestinians must have a clear idea of the framework of the final settlement before they can take the tough decisions the Israelis expect them to.

Avraham Burg, another impressive figure, felt that Mr. Arafat had lost the confidence of the peace camp in Israel; he had destroyed the unity of command and many Israelis had voted for Ariel Sharon against Mr. Arafat. The last speaker in the seminar was Mustapha Barghouti, founder of a dissident movement in the West Bank. He might have spoken for a significant section of the Palestinian society. His thesis was two-fold: Do not treat the Palestinians as part of the Arab world that had done precious little for the Palestinian cause all these decades; and, negotiations with Israel should take place only after fresh Palestinian elections.

The seminar brought out the understanding, which the two peoples have for each other, the similarity of approach and the willingness of each to accommodate the concerns of the other. However, it would be a grave error to ignore the real and deep suspicions among them, as well as the fears that each side has of the other. There is no end in sight to the cycle of suicide bombings and targeted killings. The Geneva Accords and the discussions in Seville demonstrate, however, that there is no dearth of people of goodwill on both sides.

The seminar on the Middle East brought out the understanding, which the Palestinians and the Israelis have for each other.

laid down specific destinations, unlike Oslo, which did not impose concrete obligations on the parties. He also said that the Americans had made a mistake by monopolising the stage in Aqaba in June 2003, ignoring other members of the Quartet.

The relevance or otherwise of Yasser Arafat inevitably came in for considerable discussion. The Israeli delegates said categorically that Mr. Arafat was a duly elected leader of the Palestinian Authority and that Israel had no right to tell the Palestinians who their leader should be. There was nonetheless a feeling that Mr. Arafat could certainly help his Prime Minister in various ways. Mr. Moratinos struck the right balance; Mr. Arafat, he said, had been in jail for nearly two years and was understandably bitter. While Mr. Arafat was a part of the problem, he undeniably was a big part of the solution also.

In an eloquent speech, Shlomo Ben Ami, who was the chief Israeli negotiator at Taba in January 2001, where the two sides came very close to

Israel's fence divides UN

Serial strike toll mounts to 10

United Nations/Gaza, October 21

ARAB AND non-aligned nations gave strong support to a pair of resolutions that would condemn Israel's construction of a barrier that juts deep into the West Bank, and call on the world court to issue an opinion on whether it is legal. As resentment over Israel's "land-grab" barrier mounted, so did the toll from Monday's midnight twin Israeli air-raids in Gaza. Five serial Israeli raids throughout Monday killed 10 Palestinians and injured at least 100.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat demanded immediate international action on Tuesday "to stop this military madness", after the twin midnight strikes that killed seven. Arafat said world leaders, including a "Quartet" of powers trying to secure peace, should "immediately intervene to stop this military madness ... aiming to destroy the Holy Land".

Palestinian militant groups vowed to avenge the raids. "We will avenge your blood," Hamas supporters shouted during a funeral march after the air strikes. "Most of those killed are civilians. It's the bloodiest ... most dangerous escalation in years," Palestinian negotiator S. Erekat said.

On Tuesday night, 40 Israeli Army jeeps and armoured cars entered the centre of Ramallah, which houses Arafat's headquarters, imposed a curfew and surrounded the landmark Abdul Nasser mosque, witnesses said.

Five persons were injured after Israelis fired with rubber bullets after they were stoned. An Israeli military source confirmed that forces had entered the city.

The UN General Assembly began discussing the two resolutions on Monday night and was to meet on Tuesday, possibly for a vote. The proposals - backed by members of the Arab League, Non-Aligned Movement and OIC - are certain to pass because no country has a veto in the General Assembly and support for the

Iran softens stand on EU's nuke demand

IRAN AGREED with EU foreign ministers on Tuesday to suspend its disputed uranium enrichment programme and sign an agreement allowing tougher UN inspections of its nuclear sites, an official said. "We agreed to suspend enrichment and sign the protocol" on tougher inspections, said the official anonymously.

A European diplomat had earlier said Iran had agreed to halt uranium enrichment and reprocessing of nuclear fuel as demanded by the West, which fears it may have a covert nuke programme.

Reuters, Tehran

Palestinians runs high.

One resolution would call on the International Court of Justice, based in The Hague, Netherlands, to issue an advisory opinion on whether Israel is "under legal obligation to cease its construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ... and to dismantle the existing parts."

Palestinians say the barrier is a land grab while Israel insists it is a key defence against suicide attacks. Israel's Ambassador to the UN Dan Gillerman said the request for the world court's opinion will hurt the peace process and politicise the court. Nasser Kidwa, the Palestinians' observer, called the wall "an immense war crime" and said the choice is between the wall and peace.

Arafat surgery soon

Doctors say Yasser Arafat will require surgery soon to remove gallstones, but otherwise his health is fine. "He has recovered from a severe stomach infection but has gallstones," an aide said.

Agencies

22 OCT 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

U.S. draft sets deadline for Iraq polls

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, Oct. 14. The United States has circulated yet another version of its draft Iraq resolution in the United Nations Security Council; but the first word is that it has still some distance to cover before members sign on.

The draft that is unofficially doing the rounds speaks of the Bush administration making some changes to its earlier version. The main change is that the Iraqi leaders will have a December 15 deadline to set a timetable for a constitution and elections in cooperation with the occupation authority and a representative of the United Nations. But what countries such as France, Russia and Germany are looking for is a firm schedule for ending occupation and the lat-

est draft does not have it. Three veto-holding members of the Council along with the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, had called for the setting up of a provisional Iraq government within months.

The draft resolution — the third in this series — has not made any changes as far as the role of a multinational force in Iraq. The command centre would be widened but the force would still be led by an American General.

The Bush administration, according to one version, has not extensively altered the role of the U.N. in Iraq either under the proposed new scheme of things — the role of the world body is said to have been “enhanced” but still confined primarily to the drafting of the new constitution and running the elections. This has again set in mo-

tion a doubt as to whether Mr. Annan will sign on to the deal paving the way for the return of U.N. staff to Iraq.

Washington is keen that a vote on this new resolution should be out of the way by the time the donors' meeting gets under way in Madrid next week. One unofficial deadline for the Security Council vote seems to be this Wednesday.

What is being emphasised in many quarters in New York and here is that while the U.S. may be able to get the required nine votes for the resolution to be passed and may even have it without any vetoes, this kind of scenario would signal political weakness which would have its share of implications. Washington would be extremely pleased if all of the Permanent Members went along with the resolution.

15 OCT 2003

15 OCT 2003

Syria warns Israel against repeating strike

By Atul Aneja

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MANAMA, OCT. 11. Syria today warned Israel that it had to the right to exercise "self-defence" in case Israel repeated attacking its territory as it did last Sunday. "In case of a repetition (of an Israeli aggression) Syria has the right to exercise self-defence," Syria's foreign ministry spokesperson, Bushra Kanafani told a press briefing in Damascus. Israel had raided a site, which it alleged was being used for training Palestinian extremists, just 15 km from Damascus in the wake of the suicide bombing in Haifa in northern Israel that killed 20 people.

Syria maintains that last Sunday's air raid was on a civilian area and that the offices of Palestinian factions in Syria only performed media functions. In Syria, the view that is gaining ground is that Israel and the United States are working together to increase pressure on it. Syria's chief Islamic cleric, Sheik Ahmad Kuftaro, said on Friday that Israel would not have targeted Syria, had it not received U.S. backing.

Three days after the air raid, a committee of the U.S. Congress approved a legislation to impose sanctions on Syria, after accusing Damascus of sponsoring terrorists, seeking weapons of mass

destruction and occupying Lebanon with more than 20,000 troops. Syria's warning to Israel on Saturday was preceded by a virtual ultimatum by the chief of Hizbollah, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, that his organisation would not remain passive in case Israel attacked Syria or Lebanon again. "If (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon attacks Lebanon and Syria, we will definitely be faced with a new challenge," Sheikh Nasrallah said at a rally on Friday south of Beirut.

"We will be obliged to confront him in Lebanon... The only choice for us is to defend our country," Sheikh Nasrallah described last week's Israeli air strike inside Syria — the first in three decades — as "a very grave development."

The Hizbollah group, which is mainly comprised of Shias, has close links with Syria and Iran. It was mainly responsible for the Israeli retreat from southern Lebanon after 18 years of occupation in 2000.

The possible U.S. legislation to impose sanctions on Syria under the Syria Accountability Act is unlikely to have a major economic impact as U.S.-Syrian annual trade notches up approximately \$300 millions. But politically, it would symbolise a deteriorating relationship between Damascus and Washington.

THE HINDU

12 OCT 2003

A land under siege

AT THE crack of dawn, residents of Baghdad routinely wake up to the rumble of U.S. trucks, troop carriers and occasionally tanks scooting back to their bases after a night out on the streets. The Americans fear the half-light of daybreak as their vulnerability increases to hit-and-run attacks by Iraqi fighters firing rocket-propelled grenades. During the night the sounds of gunfire and an odd explosion are common in the Iraqi capital.

After the night curfew, Baghdad rises to another day of violence, crime, and loud street protests targeting the U.S. occupation forces. Signs of anger at the American occupation are visible all over Baghdad. There are staggering numbers of individuals who have lost their jobs after the Americans decided to purge the Baathists — sacking all those, especially in the security services, suspected of having affiliations to the ousted President, Saddam Hussein. Some of them, part of Iraq's growing army of the jobless, can now be seen, black banners in hand, demonstrating outside buildings where the U.S. occupation authorities live and work. But many are not petitioning and are part of the growing armed resistance to U.S. rule in Iraq.

The U.S. decision to sack thousands of oil workers and engineers has further swelled the anti-American ranks. Many of these personnel are now on the side of the resistance and are advising it on how to effectively cripple Iraqi oil pipelines. Not surprisingly, the main northern Iraqi Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline to Turkey has been blasted several times in the recent past.

Behind the rising tide of opposition to the U.S. lies a wounded sense of Iraqi nationalism and pride. "There were tears in my eyes the day Baghdad fell to U.S. forces," recalls Abu Mariam, a veteran of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war who now runs a taxi service in Baghdad. "When my seven-year-old daughter asked me why I was crying, how could I explain to her how humiliating it was for an Iraqi to live under alien occupation?"

For some ordinary Iraqis, the lawlessness that has descended on Baghdad after the unseating of the Baathist regime is unbearable. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the name acquired by the U.S. occupation forces, and its head, Paul Bremer, are the obvious target of their anger. Most Iraqis are convinced that it is the duty of the occupation forces to maintain law and order.

Despite the churning that post-war Iraq is experiencing, some people, mostly traders and businessmen, all over the country have their



American soldiers on the streets of Baghdad.

Signs of anger at the American occupation are visible all over Baghdad, writes Atul Aneja who was there recently.

gun to do reasonable business. But Baghdad is far from normal and shuts down by sunset, for that is when looters and extortionists, called "Ali Baba" by the local people, surface. Visitors to the city are advised to carry no more and no less than \$200 on their person. Anything less and the looters in their disappointment can cause physical harm and anything more would be foolish.

Baghdad's streets are a common sight. Most new cars

flyovers that Saddam Hussein's regime constructed are choking with traffic. This is because cars of all kinds are emptying into post-war Iraq where import duties are unheard of. Most are second hand models from Jordan and Dubai. In Baghdad, partially-painted and barely pliable wrecks, some with a door or two missing, rattling along with the gaudy new entrants is a common sight.

administration plates as the traffic department is yet to wake up from its war-enforced slumber. Signal lights in some parts of the city are functioning, and policemen are beginning to make a reappearance. But in many more are required to regulate Baghdad's burgeoning traffic. Notwithstanding its hustle and bustle, Baghdad remains a violent

Pachachim, are respected and others like the Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani, have a mass following in parts of the Kurdish highlands of northern Iraq. Exiles like Ahmad Chalabi, who for years stayed in cushy environs abroad and are known to have been cultivated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pentagon, are the subject of much derision in the streets of Baghdad.

After the recent assassination of Aqila-al-Hashmi, a prominent governing council member, some of the leaders are taking added security precautions. They frequently change their residences, and establishing contact with them inside Baghdad is now virtually impossible.

On the banks of the Tigris, the blackened ruins of Government buildings stand out. Wrecked by the intense waves of bombing, they were later hollowed out by armies of looters. The wrath of the invading forces was especially unleashed on the former Iraqi Olympic Committee building — the nine-storey headquarters of Saddam Hussein's slain son, Uday. Blasted by a barrage of missiles, only its charred frame of concrete remains.

As Baghdad struggles to cope with the post-war chaos, its massive Shia underclass slum called Sadr city is stirring energetically. The Shias believe their time has come with the exit of Mr. Hussein from power. Their desire to emerge as Iraq's new rulers after decades of Sunni governance is evident all over Iraq.

In Sadr city, formerly Saddam city, this emotion is even more pronounced. Sadr city, named after the Shia leader Ayatollah Sadeq al Sadr who was murdered in 1999, is in the grip of what is called the Sadrist movement. Led by the young firebrand Muqtada al Sadr, son of the late Ayatollah, the Shias here, as in few other parts of the country, are clamouring for an Islamic state.

The forces influencing the residents of Sadr city are complex. Muqtada al Sadr is believed to be a follower of Kazim al-Hussein al-Hairi who resides in Qom in Iran, but his message is also tempered by his occasionally fractious interaction with the supreme Shia collegium, the Hawza, that sits in Najaf and exercises an influence over Shias all over the globe. The revered Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani who is disinclined to involve the higher Shia clergy in politics heads the Hawza. Shia political and religious aspirations often find expression during

the

prominent landmark in the city, has emerged as the icon of the occupation. A high security fence encloses a km-deep brown expanse of barren land from which the hotel building sticks out. Patrolling in the zone is intense with U.S. Army Humvees and armoured vehicles all around. Yet the Iraqi underground targeted the fourteenth floor of the Rashid hotel with rockets recently.

Iraq's interim governing council, handpicked by the CPA, is finding it self extremely vulnerable. Most Iraqis dismiss it as a U.S. puppet,

Syrian threat livens W Asia rhetoric

H1-15
9/10/02



REUTERS

A Palestinian woman carries her child through Qalandya checkpoint into Ramallah on Wednesday.

Jerusalem, October 8

ISRAEL ON Wednesday dismissed a threat by Syria's ambassador to Spain that Damascus would retaliate militarily if it carried out more attacks on Syrian territory as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon convened his cabinet to discuss Tel Aviv's next moves.

One of several security measures that has been given the go-ahead is a special order to call-up reservists in the wake of numerous alerts over pending suicide attacks. Some ministers also want Israel to carry out a threat to "re-muster" Palestinian President Yasser Arafat after Saturday's suicide bombing but Sharon has until now opposed this, saying it could be counter-productive.

Though the latest violence has dealt further blows to peace hopes, Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Korei, who was sworn in with a small emergency Cabinet on Tuesday, renewed calls for progress on the US-backed peace "roadmap". He also made a fresh appeal for a ceasefire with Israel, saying he was ready to start talks immediately.

Labour Minister Zevulun Orlev, however, restated Israel's objections, saying: "Israel does not have to give him a chance. He needs to prove himself through action and not through pleasant words." The roadmap sets out steps to end three years of violence and establish a Palestinian state by 2005 but has stalled after a new wave of suicide-bombings and Israeli track-and-kill raids.

Beleaguered Arafat survived heart attack

YASSER ARAFAT has suffered a mild heart attack but the Palestinian leadership has sought to keep his health problems secret for fear it will "create panic".

The 74-year-old President, who suffers from Parkinson's disease, disappeared from public view last week and re-emerged at the weekend looking very ill. His face was pale and pinched, he had lost weight and he was almost inaudible. He had trouble standing for more than a few minutes at a time.

The media said he was suffering from flu. But officials said Arafat had suffered a heart attack last week. "Although he has had a heart attack, doctors say he will make a full recovery ... he's in full control. There's nothing to worry about," said an aide.

The Guardian, Jerusalem.

On the threat from the Syrian ambassador Mohsen Bilal in Madrid, an Israeli Army source said "this sort of statement is intended for the Arab world, to give the impression that Syria is steadfast in the fight against Israel".

"Israel does not seek an escalation with Syria, and indeed has taken precautions to prevent that. We will act in self-defence if

necessary, but not if Damascus receives our message that it must stop supporting terror," the source said. Israel launched its deepest strike into Syria for 30 years on Sunday, hitting an alleged training base for Palestinian militants a day after a suicide-bomber killed 19 people in the Israeli resort of Haifa.

Syria called the target a civilian site, and Bilal said a Syrian response could come soon. "If Israel continues to attack us, what are we supposed to do? Tell them 'welcome'? Of course we will have to defend ourselves by all means," he said.

The Israeli officer played down the threat saying "it is highly unlikely (Syrian President) Assad would launch a conventional war - using terrorist proxies like Hizbollah is more of an option. But even that would be surprising given the American scrutiny on Damascus now". Israel was buoyed by support from President George Bush after threatening on Tuesday to hit enemies anywhere, although Bush also said Sharon must show caution.

In another act of belligerence, Israeli jets roared over Lebanon on Wednesday, two days after an Israeli soldier and a Lebanese boy were killed in border flare-ups, residents said. They said Israeli fighters flew as far as the northern port of Tripoli, breaking the sound barrier over capital Beirut and swooping over the Bekaa Valley - a stronghold of the Syrian-backed Hizbollah.

Reuters & AP

Turkey to send troops, Iraqis object

Ankara/Baghdad, Oct. 7 (Reuters): Turkey's parliament voted today to send troops to Iraq at the request of its US occupiers, but members of Iraq's governing council criticised the plan.

The US wants other countries to shoulder some of the financial and military burden resulting from the invasion that toppled President Saddam Hussein in April. But representatives of several parties on the US-appointed governing council said its members had all agreed to reject the presence of any troops from neighbours, including Turkey.

"The governing council's stand is against the presence of troops from neighbouring countries without exception, and Turkey is one of these countries," said Nabeil al-Moussawi of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), whose head Ahmad Chalabi is a leading councillor.

Council head Iyad Allawi later said no formal decision had been taken and councillors would meet Iraq's US governor Paul Bremer tomorrow to discuss the issue.

"We have concerns about the deployment, it is true, but we understand the (US-led) coalition decision to have additional troop contributions," Allawi said.

US difficulties in Iraq were underlined by two bombs near Baghdad which killed three Americans as well as an Iraqi interpreter in separate incidents last night.

Ankara's parliament voted overwhelmingly to approve deploying soldiers without specifying how many. The ruling party said it still needed to iron out conditions on any deployment, which would be the first in Iraq by a mainly Muslim nation.

Turkish officials have spoken in the past of sending up to 10,000 soldiers, which would be the largest contingent in the country after US and British forces.

With international disputes over the war still raw, few states, even US allies in Nato, are willing to contribute troops while the US insists on keeping control. Turkey's decision might help to redeem it in US eyes — it upset Washington's war plans by refusing to let US forces use bases there to launch attacks when the campaign began in March.

But Turkish troops could face opposition from Iraqis, particularly Kurds suspicious of Ankara's motives after years of its military conflict with Turkish Kurdish separatist rebels in the northern border zone.

"I don't want Turkish troops coming to Iraq. They will be attacked when they pass through the north," Kurdish taxi driver Saddam Younis, 27, said in Mosul. Turkey has Nato's second biggest army after the US and its forces would probably be deployed in the Arab, Sunni-dominated central region, not the Kurdish north.

The central region has been the scene of the fiercest resistance to the occupation. In a further sign of the instability even at the heart of the occupied Iraqi capital, a blast hit the foreign ministry compound, followed by a short exchange of gunfire nearby. The US military said there were no casualties.

In all, 91 American troops have been killed in action since President George W. Bush declared major combat over on May 1.

Leak sources

The White House today ruled out three senior aides as possible sources for a leak disclosing the name of an undercover CIA operative and President George W. Bush said the case may never be resolved.

"I have no idea whether we'll find out who the leaker is," Bush said after he met his Cabinet. "I'd like to. I want to know the truth."

GWYNNE DYER

FIFTH COLUMN

TALKING
VAGUELY
OF PEACE

Hanadi Tayseer Jaradat, who walked into Maxim's restaurant in Haifa last Saturday and blew herself up, killing 19 others and injuring 50, was born and raised in the West Bank and never left Israeli-ruled territory in her life. Nobody can cross the heavily fortified border between Syria and Israel except the United Nations team that has observed the demilitarized zone since 1973. So why did Israel "retaliate" for the atrocity she committed in Haifa by bombing Syria for the first time in 30 years?

Israel's attack on what Damascus calls a civilian area and Jerusalem calls a Palestinian training camp was a small action militarily, but it is a very big deal. A 30-year cease-fire has been breached, and a precipice beckons. Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, less than three years in the job that his father held for 30 years, is feeling deeply insecure. He has a hostile Israel to the west and now a large American army to his east in Iraq, but the elders of the Syrian Ba'ath Party will not forgive him if he appears weak. This could end in a war.

Syria would lose the war, of course, and Assad would likely end up dead, so he will do all he can to avoid it. There may be a few worried neo-cons in Washington, watching the slide in George W. Bush's ratings and looking around for another plausible war against a "terrorist state" to mobilize public support for next year's election, who would be willing to take out an option on Syria, but the smart money in that race is on an American attack on Iran.

Israeli warplanes attack Islamic Jihad base in Syria

Jerusalem: Israeli warplanes attacked an Islamic Jihad training base deep in Syria in retaliation for a suicide bombing at a Haifa restaurant that killed 19 people, the army said on Sunday. The raid was the first Israeli attack on Syrian soil in more than two decades, according to Israeli media.

The attack, which occurred late Saturday or early Sunday, took place at the Ein Sahev camp about 15 km northwest of Damascus, according to Israeli officials. The base was used by several terrorist organisations, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the army said in a statement. "Syria has been warned more than once by the United States that it should close all the facilities of the Islamic Jihad," Israeli government spokesman Avi Pazner said. "Apparently it has not done so. And it is our policy after what happened yesterday to go after Islamic Jihad wherever they are."

The Syrian government had no immediate response. Speaking on

the Al-Jazeera television network, Abu Emad El-Refaei, an Islamic Jihad spokesman in Beirut, denied that there were any Islamic Jihad bases in Syria. "We do not have any training camps or bases in Syria or any other country," he said. "All our bases are inside the Palestinian occupied territories." A senior commander for the radical Damascus-based Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command said in Damascus that the camp was one of their deserted bases, not on an Islamic Jihad camp. A civilian guard was injured in the attack, the commander said.

The attack came several hours after a Palestinian woman wrapped in explosives entered a beachside restaurant in Haifa during the busy lunchtime hour and blew herself up, killing 19 people. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for that attack. "The army has started operating against those behind the attack, those who support (terror) and



A wounded woman is carried away from the scene of a suicide bombing attack in a restaurant in the northern Israeli port city of Haifa on Saturday. A Palestinian woman blew herself up in the Arab-owned Maxim beach restaurant, killing at least 19 people.

those who use the strategy of terror in order to harm citizens of Israel," the army said in a statement.

Islamic Jihad, a militant Palestinian group responsible for many attacks against Israel, enjoys support from other countries, including Iran and Syria, the statement said.

"Syria is a state that supports terror, that constantly tries to frustrate efforts to bring calm and stability to the region and gives cover in its territory and capital to the terror organisations that act against Israeli citizens," the army said.

The statement also accused Iran of funding and directing Islamic Jihad. "Israel will not accept the rules of the game that the terrorists are trying to dictate, and will act with determination against all who harm its citizens, in accordance with the right to self-defence and defence of the state," it said.

On April 16, 2001, Israeli war-

planes blasted a Syrian radar station in Lebanon, where Syria is the main power broker, killing three Syrian soldiers. That strike was the first in five years against the Syrian military and came in retaliation for an attack by Syrian-backed guerrillas in which an Israeli soldier was killed. Syria closed the offices of both Hamas and Islamic Jihad after the US invasion of Iraq out of fear it could be the next nation targeted by the US.

The US had been pushing Syria to act further and expel Hamas and Islamic Jihad leader, but Syria has refused.

Western diplomats say Syria is loathe to be seen as betraying the Palestinian cause, and it also does not want to give up one of the few bargaining chips it still has in negotiations with Israel. Despite Syrian denials, the diplomats say Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders in Syria give directions to the groups' members in the West Bank and Gaza. ^{AP}

Human shield around Arafat

Ramallah: Foreign and Israeli peace activists formed a human shield around Yasser Arafat at his headquarters on Sunday as Israel warned the clock was ticking towards the Palestinian leader's removal.

Eight activists from Israel and around 20 more from the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) had gathered at Mr Arafat's offices in the West Bank town of Ramallah, pledging to defend the veteran leader come what may. "We rushed here from Gush Shalom to provide a human shield and perhaps be able to prevent the Israeli army from executing its plans. We will stay here as long as we feel there is a danger," he added. ^{AFP}

India-Oman fertilizer project kicks-off

HD 16/3/03 By Atul Aneja west arab 11

MANAMA, OCT. 2 India and Oman have taken a major step towards cementing their economic partnership by setting in motion the construction of a giant fertilizer manufacturing facility that will see New Delhi making one of its largest investments abroad. India's Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizer, S. S. Dhindsa, and His Highness, Sayyid Talal bin Tariq Al Said, a senior member of the Omani Royalty, presided on Wednesday over the foundation laying ceremony for the \$969 million fertilizer unit at Qalat near Sur, 150 km away from Oman's capital Muscat.

Two Indian firms, Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) and Krishak Bharati Cooperative (KRIBHCO) have a 25 per cent stake each while the Oman Oil Company has a 50 per cent share in the joint venture named Oman-India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO). The firm will produce 1.65 million tonnes of granulated urea and 250,000 tonnes of surplus ammonia annually to cater to India's future fertilizer demand.

The project proposed during the 1993 visit to

Oman by the former Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, is part of an effort to substantiate the India-Oman relationship through joint forays in a variety of fields including energy and defence. Mr. Dhindsa during his address at the ceremony described the joint venture as reflecting India's "desire to pursue more closer political, strategic and economic links" with Oman.

Snamprogetti of Italy and Technip of France are undertaking the turnkey project while technology providers include Haldor Topsoe of Denmark and Hydro-Agri. The project cost is being met by \$320 million of equity and \$649 million of debt. The lead financiers are BNP Paribas, ANZ Investment bank and Arab banking Corporation along with 19 other banks.

The urea produced by OMIFCO is expected to cost \$150 per tonne in the first year, but prices will drop to \$85 from the second year, averaging \$113 for a 15-year time-span. The unit is expected to be completed towards the third quarter of 2005. India will provide the skilled manpower for operating and maintaining the facility, apart from training Omani technical personnel.

THE HINDU

2003
3 OCT 2003

Annan, Paris question new draft on Iraq

United Nations, October 2

THE US on Thursday tabled a new draft resolution on Iraq, but UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan questioned whether it went far enough in changing attitudes toward foreigners in the still-occupied country.

"We are studying it. We will have to determine whether it is a radical change from the past, or what it is," Annan told reporters. "Obviously it's not going in the direction I had recommended, but I will still have to study it further."

Germany, which opposed the US-led war, gave a warm response to the new draft, but Paris reacted with a "no comment". No Security Council member has threatened to veto the draft but France and others are considering abstaining.

The new draft emphasises a step-by-step transfer of power to Iraqis but gives no timetable for the end of the occupation. It strengthens the UN's duties but does not give the world body an independent role in overseeing the transition to sovereignty in Iraq as many wanted.

The main purpose of the new resolution, as in earlier drafts, is to transform the military operation into a UN-authorized multinational force under American command. This is aimed at attracting more contributions from nations wary of sending soldiers as part of an occupation force, although volunteers appear to be scarce.

Several Security Council ambassadors privately agreed with Annan, saying the new draft would probably not

change perceptions inside or outside Iraq as it contained few steps heralding the end of the occupation.

After the August 19 bombing of the UN's Baghdad headquarters that killed 22 people, Annan had told council ambassadors he wanted a new "radical" approach that would make it safe enough for UN staff to return. Only about 30 international staff out of more than 600 are still in the country.

One way to change perceptions on the ground would be to turn over power to a provisional Iraq government within three to five months, Annan and other UN officials have said. "What we want is a sovereign provisional government as soon as possible so we can work in Iraq like we do in other countries instead of being asked to be part of military occupation," one senior UN official said.

The Bush administration wants the resolution adopted before an October 23-24 donors conference in Madrid on rebuilding Iraq.

Three soldiers killed

Guerrillas killed three American soldiers in the latest wave of attacks in Iraq, the US Army said on Thursday. A soldier from the 4th Infantry Division was killed on Wednesday evening in a rocket-propelled grenade attack on a convoy driving through Samarra. A female soldier was killed earlier on Wednesday. In another incident, a soldier was killed in an ambush in Baghdad on Wednesday.

Agencies

Sharon questioned in corruption cases

Jerusalem: Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was questioned by the police on Thursday in two corruption investigations, Israeli media said.



A. Sharon

Mr Sharon, the third sitting prime minister to be investigated by the police, has denied any wrongdoing.

One probe involves a US\$1.5 million loan from a South African businessman to Mr Sharon's two sons, allegedly used to cover illegal

contributions to his 1999 election campaign. In the second case, police are looking into a business deal between Mr Sharon's younger son, Gilad, and businessman David Appel, who has ties with Mr Sharon's Likud party.

Mr Appel allegedly paid Gilad Sharon hundreds of thousands of dollars to market a tourism project in Greece. Police are investigating whether Gilad Sharon was hired in an attempt to get his father, who was foreign minister at the time, to assist in getting the Greek authorities to approve the land deal. AP

Palestinian PM has two-stage plan to end violence

Jerusalem: Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Korei said on Thursday that he has a two-stage strategy for achieving a cease-fire to end three years of West Asia violence—first, negotiate a truce with militant Palestinian groups, and then ask the Israelis to match it.

Violence continued on Thursday. A 12-year-old boy was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers in the Balata refugee camp while Palestinians were throwing rocks, residents said. They said the boy was a distance away from the confrontation and was not involved. The military said soldiers shot a Palestinian who was throwing fire-bombs.

Also, Israeli soldiers shot and killed a Palestinian man and injured another after they crossed into a restricted area around the fence that separates Gaza from Israel, military sources said.

The men had no weapons, but they planted a 20 kg explosive device, the military said. The bomb was neutralised by the army.

The dead man's family identified him as Mohammed Awad, 26, a supporter of the Islamic Jihad militant group. AP

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 OCT 2003

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Obituary: Edward Said (1935-2003)

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Exile and other kingdoms

RUDRANGSHU MUKHERJEE

"Yet the books will be there on the shelves,
well born,
Derived from people, but also from
radiance, heights."
— Czeslaw Milosz

Edward Said, who died in New York on Thursday, September 25, was born in Jerusalem in 1935. He had been ill for a long time and he fought leukaemia with a rare courage, never stopping his work and never compromising on the fundamental values that he lived by.

He was born to affluence and spent his childhood in Cairo. Almost all his adult life was occupied in studying and teaching in some of the best Ivy League campuses — Princeton, Harvard and Columbia. He was one of the most prolific writers and commentators in the second half of the 20th century. He was the author of more than a score of books and innumerable essays and articles. Said's obvious erudition was matched by a fine sensibility and an irreducible humanity. He was a marvellous public speaker and an accomplished pianist and no mean performer on the tennis court.

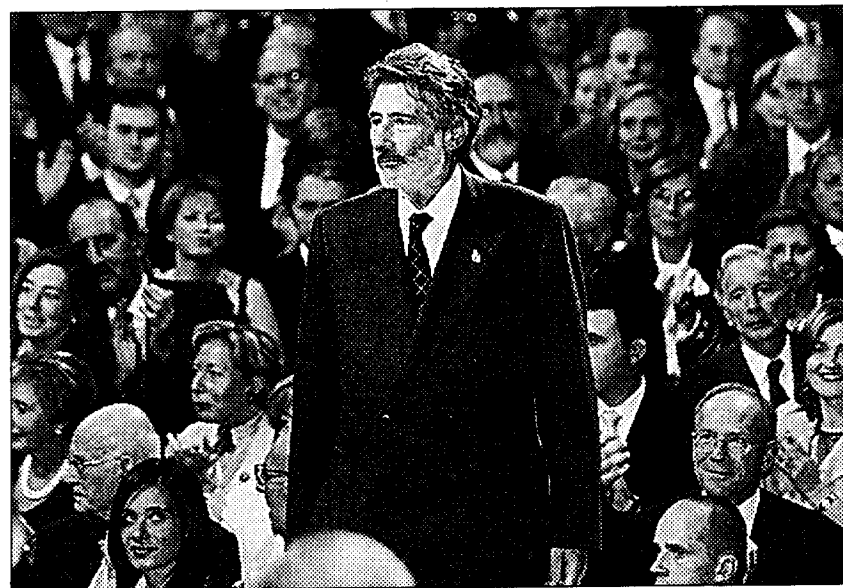
In his memoirs, appropriately called *Out of Place* (1999), Said wrote, "I occasionally experience myself as a cluster of flowing currents." He preferred this to "the idea of a solid self". Indeed, currents of history, contemporary politics, literature, Western classical music and critical theory came together in the work and ideas of Edward Said. Everything he wrote was informed by an acute sense of engagement. Said was nothing if not passionate. But this did not take away from the rigour of his exposition and the clarity of his thought.

These qualities were nowhere better manifest than in *Orientalism* (1978), the book that shot him into international prominence and transfigured him into a cult figure. The book was as provocative and polemical as it was original. Said looked at an entire corpus of writing on the Orient, emanating from the West — novelists, philosophers, historians, politicians, *et al* — and demonstrated that these had invested the Orient with certain attributes and attitudes which were never complimentary. The West, Said argued, had taken the Orient as an inert object which was incapable of representing itself.

The West had produced the Orient to suit and justify the West's domination of the Orient. He labelled as Orientalism this body of knowledge that engendered an intellectual colonization, lasting well beyond the passing of colonialism. "Because of Orientalism," Said wrote, "the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action."

Said was careful not to descend into a crass determinism. He wrote, "This is not to say that Orientalism unilaterally determines what can be said about the Orient but that it is the whole network of interests inevitably brought to bear on (and therefore always involved in) any occasion when that peculiar entity 'Orient' is in question." The Orient, he suggested, was Europe's "underground self".

Orientalism questioned some of the fundamental assumptions involved in the disciplines of social science and literary theory. Said called for greater "methodological self-consciousness".



Nothing if not passionate

The analysis of human experience, the core of the human sciences, could not be confined to a grid of stereotypes. "How does one represent other cultures? What is another culture? Is the notion of a distinct culture (or race, or religion, or civilization) a useful one, or does it always get involved either in self congratulation (when one discusses one's own) or hostility and aggression when one discusses the 'other'?" These were some of the issues that Said queried and invited others to ask in their chosen fields. Above all, Said forced scholars to enquire how ideas come to acquire authority and even the status of natural truths. Said's book marked the fall from innocence. The assumptions underpinning the human sciences could not be the same for anyone who had felt and assimilated the impact of *Orientalism*.

It was not as if the dominance of Orientalism had gone unchallenged. Said returned to the theme of resistance in

Culture and Imperialism (1993). The Western invader never encountered an inert native. The process of setting up an empire always involved the suppression of resistance and negotiations with native knowledge. The historical experience of resistance to empire was the theme of this book. Said's access to this experience was through narrative which was crucial to his argument. Said wrote, "My basic point [is] that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own

lectually rich conversations with the conductor, Daniel Barenboim, which appeared as *Parallels and Paradoxes* (2002). On his fascination with music, Said wrote movingly, if a touch too cerebrally, "music's extraordinary disciplinary rigour, its capacity for plurality of voice, for expressiveness, for a whole range of performative possibilities, for a fascinating though sometimes arcane capacity to internalize, refer to, and go beyond its own history, have compelled my attention and have sharpened as well as deepened my other, more superficially worldly concerns."

The other aspect is Said's commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people. He campaigned through public lectures and writings for the rights of the people of Palestine. He exposed relentlessly the oppression of the state of Israel and worked to ensure peace in the region. He did not ever separate this political side of his life and work from his intellectual concerns and commitments. Out of this emerged — almost as a leitmotif to all that he wrote, said and did — Said's reflections on the perpetual state of dispossession and exile. He was nowhere at home. The sense of dissonance engendered by this estrangement gave him a unique perch from which to look at human experience as articulated in literature, history, music and politics. His quest was for alternative communities that have emerged from the heightened experience of exile.

Said, however, was not a part of that community or any other. As an intellectual who took his responsibilities very seriously (see *The Representations of the Intellectual*, 1994) he was invariably on his guard and always sceptical. He believed in the powers of the intellectual and of the independent individual: "as an intellectual you are the one who can choose between actively representing the truth to the best of your ability, and passively allowing a patron or an authority to direct you." Edward Said was his own director.

It is significant, and ironic, that Said's preoccupation in his last years was with late works. Late works, Said suggested, illustrating his point with reference to Beethoven's last string quartets and piano sonatas, the Ninth Symphony and *Missa Solennis*, do not seek an easy resolution; late works avoid closure, are marked by intransigence and an "irascible transgressiveness". Late works appealed to the exile's restlessness which Said claimed as his own.

Said cherished sleeplessness. Sleep, or any diminishing of awareness, to him was like death. It is difficult to accept that he has been untimely claimed by the big sleep.

Said, leading voice of Palestinians, dead

New York: Edward W. Said, a Columbia University professor and leading spokesman in the United States for the Palestinian cause, has died, his editor at Knopf publishers said on Thursday. He was 67.



Edward W. Said

Mr Said had suffered from leukemia for years and died at a New York hospital late Wednesday, editor Shelley Wanger said.

Mr Said was born in 1935 in Jerusalem, then part of British-ruled Palestine, but he spent most of his adult life in the US. He wrote passionately about the Palestinian cause but also on a variety of other subjects, from English literature, his academic specialty, to music and culture.

When it came to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Said was consistently critical of Israel for what he regarded as mistreatment of the Palestinians. He wrote two years ago after visits to Jerusalem and the West Bank that Israel's "efforts toward exclusivity and xenophobia toward the Arabs" had actually strengthened Palestinian determination. "Palestine and Palestinians remain, despite Israel's concerted efforts from the beginning either to get rid of them or to circumscribe them so much as to make them ineffective," Said wrote in the English-language 'Al-Ahram' weekly, published in Cairo.

In 2000, he prompted a controversy when he threw a rock toward an Israeli guardhouse on the Lebanese border. Columbia University did not censure him, saying that the stone was directed at no one, no law was broken and that his actions were protected by principles of academic freedom. Mr Said moved to the US as a student. He received a bachelor's degree from Princeton in 1957 and a master's and Ph.D. from Harvard, in 1960 and 1964. AP

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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LV

Saddam in secret talks with US: report

London, September 21

OUSTED IRAQI President Saddam Hussein has been in secret negotiations with US forces in Iraq for the past nine days for a safe passage out of Iraq, a leading London tabloid claimed on Sunday. The deposed dictator is demanding safe exit to the former Soviet Republic of Belarus, *The Sunday Mirror* stated in a front-page story.

But another tabloid, *The Mail on Sunday*, claimed that Saddam Hussein had fled Baghdad hidden in a "watermelon barge" only days after US forces marched into the city.

RC 15 MG

While the world held its breath for his capture or proof of his death, it seems Hussein was very much alive in an underground bunker — only a few yards from a mosque where the Allies had been told he was hiding, the report said.

"Saddam sneaked out of his bunker again, and boarded a high-powered boat disguised as a watermelon barge. He hid away in a secret compartment behind a cargo of fruit while he was taken up the river Tigris to his hometown of Tikrit, which had yet to fall to American forces," the report said.

The Sunday Mirror in its report said, in exchange for his safe passage, Hussein has vowed to provide information on weapons of mass destruction and disclose bank accounts where he stashed off tens of millions of dollars in plundered cash, the report claimed.

US President George Bush is being kept abreast of the "extraordinary talks" by his National Security adviser Condoleezza Rice.

She is co-ordinating negotiations in Baghdad, which are led by Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the commander of American forces in

Iraq, the *Sunday Mirror* claimed. The US, it said, has vowed never to negotiate with Saddam and want to take him dead or alive, but the White House hopes the talks will allow them to pinpoint the tyrant's exact location.

An English-speaking Iraqi representative of Saddam Hussein, who walked into the US Headquarters at Tikrit for talks with senior officers, is quoted by the tabloid as saying that Saddam had decided to strike a deal "because he is desperate, trapped and finding fewer and fewer people willing to give him shelter".

"He resorts to arriving with a

posse of armed men, and forcing them to give him hospitality. When he leaves, the frightened "hosts" are told they'll be killed if they say a word," he said.

According to the report, Saddam's representative, who walked into the headquarters on September 12, led a group of US troops to a nearby suburb where one of Saddam's security chiefs was waiting. The US officers were handed a hand-written note, purportedly from Saddam himself. The security boss had a British-made Racal military radio set, which he claimed gave

him direct contact with people in

the same room as the dictator. According to the report, he was immediately taken into custody, but the US has continued to exchange messages from Saddam.

"The discussions are now going on under the direct authority of General Sanchez. Naturally, all the major decisions are being made at the level of the National Security Council, under Condoleezza Rice," the tabloid quoted a senior Iraqi as saying.

"There's no doubt the net is closing and that his supporters' efforts to get the US to pull out of Iraq are not succeeding," said the source.

PTI

Arafat diverted \$900m public funds, says IMF

Dubai, September 20

AN AUDIT of the Palestinian Authority has revealed that President Yasser Arafat had diverted \$900 million in public funds to a special bank account he controlled and some of the money may have been misused, an International Monetary Fund official said on Saturday.

Karim Nashashibi, IMF resident representative in the West Bank and Gaza, credited openness and transparency in the Palestinian Authority's accounting under Finance Minister Salam Fayad for disclosing the transfers between 1995 and 2000.

The large majority of the money was invested in Palestinian assets at home and abroad, Nashashibi said. A Palestinian Investment Fund was established to manage those assets and privatise them, he added. But the IMF official did not rule out the possibility of the remaining funds being misused, saying he believes an audit of the remaining funds will be conducted later.

"In any system, you can always have a possibility of misuse of funds," Nashashibi said. "But what we're trying to do is have a level of disclosure and transparency so that future or present misuse does not happen ... At least there is a followup, there is disclosure."

There have been charges of corruption and mismanagement in the Palestinian Authority. In a special annual issue of *Forbes Magazine*, Arafat was reported to control \$300 million, making

him among one of the richest in its category of 'Kings, Queens and Despots'.

Nashashibi said the revenues were diverted from the budget to a special account controlled by Arafat and his chief economic adviser.

Israel rejects UN vote

Israel has dismissed a UN resolution, which demanded that it retract threats to remove Yasser Arafat while Palestinians hailed the vote as another sign of support for their leader.

The overwhelming support in the UN General Assembly on Friday comes a day after the incoming Palestinian Prime Minister defended Arafat, saying he is key to peace efforts and the US should treat him as a real partner.

Prime Minister-designate Ahmed Korei's criticism of US policy on Friday was the strongest sign yet that he does not plan to challenge Arafat, who Israel and the United States, which opposed the UN resolution, tried to circumvent by pressing for the creation of the post of Prime Minister.

Instead, Arafat appears to have maintained a central role, handpicking Korei after the resignation of the first Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, and moving to shape a Cabinet of loyalists from his Fatah party.

"Arafat is the elected leader of the Palestinian people and represents the will of these people," Korei said on Friday.

AP

Arafat ready to die if Israel expels him

Handwritten: KAN 11/19/99

Gaza: Israeli forces killed a Hamas militant in a gun battle in the Gaza Strip on Thursday, hours after Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said he would be ready to fight to the death if Israel tried to expel or kill him.

Israeli soldiers killed Jihad Abu Swerah, 34, a senior member of Hamas's armed wing during a raid in a refugee camp. It was the latest in a series of Israeli attempts to clamp down on militant groups behind suicide bombings in Israel that killed 38 people over the past month in a cycle of tit-for-tat violence that has derailed a US-backed peace plan.

Speaking to Reuters on Wednesday at his West Bank headquarters, which was half-demolished during an Israeli siege last year, Mr Arafat pointed to his machinegun lying

on the floor. "I am a Palestinian soldier...I will use my gun to defend not only myself but also defend every Palestinian child, woman and man and to defend the Palestinian existence," the 74-year-old former guerrilla leader said. "Is there anyone in Palestine who does not dream of martyrdom?" Mr Arafat asked.

Martyrdom in Islam refers to death defending one's land or religion. Suicide bombers are regarded by most Palestinians as martyrs because they are viewed to be defending their country, even when they kill civilians. Israel vowed to "remove" Arafat after 15 people were killed in back-to-back suicide bombings last week. It has not said how or when it would act against him but cabinet ministers have indicated the possibilities include killing or expelling him.

Mr Arafat made a direct appeal to Israel for a new truce, saying it can win the backing of Hamas. In a series of interviews with the Israeli media, Mr Arafat fleshed out a proposal for a new truce that was initially snubbed. "Yes, I am ready to renew the hudna. I call on Israel to renew the hudna," he told Thursday's edition of the *Yediot Aharonot* daily. "If the Israeli government takes a positive position, we can succeed. I tell the Israelis: enough blood, enough of the destruction and of the daily suffering. Our position has always been against killing Palestinians or Israelis."

In an interview late Wednesday with Israeli television, Mr Arafat also said that he wanted a truce. "All the world wants peace, for the good of the Middle East and future generations of both peoples."

In central Gaza's Nusseirat refugee camp, Israeli forces on a raid came under intense grenade and automatic weapons attack. The sounds of explosions and roadside bombs being detonated against the Israeli forces echoed across the camp. The fighting was the heaviest in the Gaza Strip in months. Israeli military sources said soldiers, backed by helicopter gunships, killed the Hamas militant after he opened fire.

Witnesses said Israeli forces also raided the West Bank city of Jenin and surrounding villages early on Thursday. The army said it made several arrests in the area. Meanwhile, Israel and the Lebanese-Hizbollah guerrilla group appeared close to finalising a prisoner exchange deal after both sides indicated progress had been made in German-mediated talks.

Foreign minister Silvan Shalom said he hoped for "good news" by the end of next week on the negotiations to swap Arab prisoners for an Israeli businessman and the bodies of three soldiers held by Hizbollah. Agencies

Renewed bid for ceasefire

- Is there anyone in Palestine who does not dream of martyrdom: Arafat
- Arafat makes direct appeal to Israel for truce
- Senior Hamas leader killed in Israeli raid
- Gaza Strip witnesses heaviest fighting in months

US blocks UN measure to protect Yasser Arafat

Jerusalem: Uniting against a US veto on a UN resolution that called on Israel to halt threats to expel Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from the West Bank, Palestinians said it showed that Washington was turning its back on the internationally brokered roadmap for peace, while the Palestinian leader said they were "stronger" than any decision.

"The international silence will not make us weak," Mr Arafat reportedly told supporters at his compound in the West Bank town of Ramallah, adding, "we do not care about any resolution here or there and we are stronger than any decision," he said.

The US said the resolution was "lopsided" and didn't condemn terrorist groups attacking Israel. US ambassador John Negroponte said the resolution did not contain a condemnation of terrorist groups such as Hamas and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, blamed for suicide attacks against Israel.

The Palestinians, who had generated wide global support for the resolution, said the vote showed the US had lost its credibility as an honest broker in West Asia. They feared the veto would be seen by Israel as a green light to move against Arafat. "It's a black day for the United Nations," chief Palestinian ne-



Palestinians, carrying portraits of Yasser Arafat, clap during a demonstration in support of their leader in Gaza City on Wednesday.

gotiator Saeb Erekat said by telephone. "I hope that Israel will not interpret the killing of this resolution as a license to kill Arafat."

Of the 15 Security Council members, 11 voted on Tuesday in favour of the resolution. Britain, Germany and Bulgaria abstained. Syria, the only Arab nation on the Security Council, had been pressing for a vote since last week's decision by Israel's security cabinet to "remove" Mr Arafat in a manner and time to be decided. Israel blames Mr Arafat for sabotaging the peace process and doing nothing to prevent terrorist attacks.

Mr Negroponte reiterated that the US didn't support the elimination or forced exile of Mr Arafat and believes that his diplomatic isolation

is the best course. "It was lopsided and that it didn't take into account the elements we thought it ought to take into account, including a robust criticism of Palestinian terrorism," he said.

At a council meeting on Monday, virtually all the 40-plus speakers condemned Israel's threats against Mr Arafat. But Mr Negroponte said the resolution would not have helped in promoting the "roadmap" for peace, which has the support of the UN and Europe. Syria's UN ambassador Fayssal Mekdad expressed regret at the vote, calling the resolution "highly balanced," and noting that most of the language came from previous resolutions that had been adopted by the Security Council. AP

15 yrs after Lockerbie, UN lifts Libya ban

United Nations, Sept. 12 (Reuters): Fifteen years after the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, the UN Security Council lifted sanctions against Libya today, clearing the release of up to \$2.7 billion to the families of the attack's 270 victims.

France and the US, which has its own sanctions on the Tripoli government including a ban on Libyan oil sales to America, abstained in the 13-0 council vote ending the sanctions, which were imposed after the 1988 bombing of the Pan Am Boeing jumbo jet in the skies over Lockerbie, Scotland.

Council approval was assured when France announced yesterday it was withdrawing a threat to veto the measure, after relatives of the victims of a separate 1989 bombing of a French airliner won the promise of additional compensation from Tripoli. British ambassador Emyr Jones Parry called the Lockerbie attack "the worst terrorist incident on United Kingdom territory." But US deputy ambassador James Cunningham cautioned that the council vote "must not be misconstrued by Libya or by the world community as tacit US acceptance that the government of Libya has rehabilitated itself."

"The US continues to have serious concerns about other aspects of Libyan behaviour including its poor human rights record, its rejection of democratic norms and standards, its irresponsible behaviour in Africa, its history of involvement in terrorism and most important, its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery," Cunningham said.

The US and Britain first called for adoption of the resolution last month, after Libya accepted blame for the Lockerbie bombing, renounced terrorism and agreed to put \$2.7 billion into a special account for compensating the victims.

THE TELEGRAPH

13 SEP 2003

13 SEP 2003

World warns Israel against Arafat exile

West Asia
(w)
11-15

18/9

Jerusalem, September 12

ISRAEL'S DECISION to expel Yasser Arafat has drawn warnings from around the world that the move would threaten the West Asia peace process, as Palestinians vowed to fight to the death to protect their veteran leader.

The Israeli Security Cabinet on Thursday night approved in principle the expulsion of Arafat as a rapid response to two suicide bombings earlier in the week. That sparked a spontaneous outpouring of support for the 74-year-old leader on the streets of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with Arafat vowing he would never be taken alive.

The Israeli decision also prompted firm condemnation from key global players, with the US, France and Russia, three backers of the West Asia peace "roadmap", speaking out firmly against any move to expel Arafat.

A senior US administration official said Washington will not work with Arafat but opposes expelling

Violence at shrine

ISRAELI POLICE stormed the compound of Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque on Friday after Palestinians angered by Israel's threats to "remove" Arafat hurled rocks at worshippers at Judaism's Western Wall. About 35,000 Muslims had gathered for prayers. After the service, hundreds of young men threw stones at the Western Wall below, where Jews were praying, police said. No injuries were reported.

AP, Jerusalem

him because that would only give him "a wider international stage."

"Our position on this is well known, longstanding and unchanged," the official said on condition of anonymity. "It is unhelpful and it is not the solution."

A defiant Arafat, who has been confined to his head-

quarters in Ramallah for the past 20 months, vowed: "No one can kick me out. They can kill me, but I will not leave." He blew kisses and flashed the victory sign. Palestinian PM-designate Ahmed Korei said expelling Arafat could "blow up" the West Asia.

"It would be unwise to expel him," UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said in Geneva.

French President Jacques Chirac said at a news conference in Spain: "I consider President Arafat the legitimate representative of the Palestinian Authority and I think it would be a serious mistake to seek to eliminate him politically."

The EU said exiling Arafat would likely escalate Israeli-Palestinian tensions. Russia said expelling him would "wipe away the prospects of a peaceful settlement".

Israel will turn Arafat into a "martyr" if it carries out its threat to expel him, Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said.

Agencies

For shame, Sharon

Exiling Arafat Will Not End Terror

THE decision of the Israeli Cabinet to remove Yasser Arafat from the West Bank drives another nail in the coffin of the roadmap for peace in Palestine. True, the decision is unlikely to be implemented immediately, but it allows Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to act as and when he chooses to do so. The widespread popular Palestinian response in support of Arafat demonstrates the futility of the Israeli initiative. Attempts to sideline Mr Arafat over the last two years have clearly not worked. Rather than becoming irrelevant, as the United States and Israel hoped, Mr Arafat has demonstrated his continuing dominance of the leadership of the Palestinian movement. The Palestinian prime minister, who the US and Israel thought would challenge Mr Arafat, has resigned. And the person chosen to replace him has suspended his move to form a Cabinet following the decision to remove Mr Arafat. In these circumstances, an Arafat in exile would possibly be even less in control of events in the West Bank. And if the word 'remove' in the statement by the Israeli Cabinet is given a more ominous and permanent meaning, the consequences can only be worse. A martyred Arafat would force even the moderates among the Palestinians to harden their stance. It is this reality that has caused the US and the European Union to distance themselves from the Israeli initiative.

Mr Sharon may have chosen to ignore this reality because of the pressures of domestic opinion. The relatively high toll in recent suicide bombings demanded a strong response from the Israeli government. But the response failed to recognise a critical flaw in Israel's approach to terrorism. It has, particularly under Mr Sharon, concentrated on killing individuals who it believes are behind the suicide bombings. But the killing of individual Hamas leaders, along with innocent non-combatants, has only created a larger body of apprentice suicide bombers. And making a martyr of Mr Arafat will add to the crowd of young Palestinians willing to die for their cause. Sooner or later Israel and the US will have to realise that the problem of terrorism is not a simple matter of removing leaders and changing governments. It is also a matter of removing the reasons, real or imaginary, that provide the recruits for terrorist acts.

Israel ready to expel Arafat

W. Arafat
 HF- US
 1719

Jerusalem, September 11

ISRAEL'S SECURITY Cabinet agreed in principle on Thursday that Palestinian President Yasser Arafat should be expelled but opted against any move to expel him immediately, sources close to the government said.

One source said that the Cabinet decided to ask the army to prepare a plan for Arafat's exile from the region but decided against immediate expulsion because of US opposition.

The Cabinet held an emergency session on Thursday to consider the expulsion of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and further strikes against militants after two suicide bombings that killed 15 Israelis.

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom said ahead of the meeting that Israel should ignore US objections and banish Arafat from the Palestinian territories.

"We are now in a situation that if we ask for such permission (from Washington), it will be virtually impossible to get it," Shalom told Army Radio.

"But sometimes, there are situations where you have to make decisions independent of outside influence," he said.

Nabil Abu Rdainah, a senior aide to

legations he has encouraged bloodshed. Israeli roadblocks have effectively confined him to his compound in the West Bank city of Ramallah for the past two years.

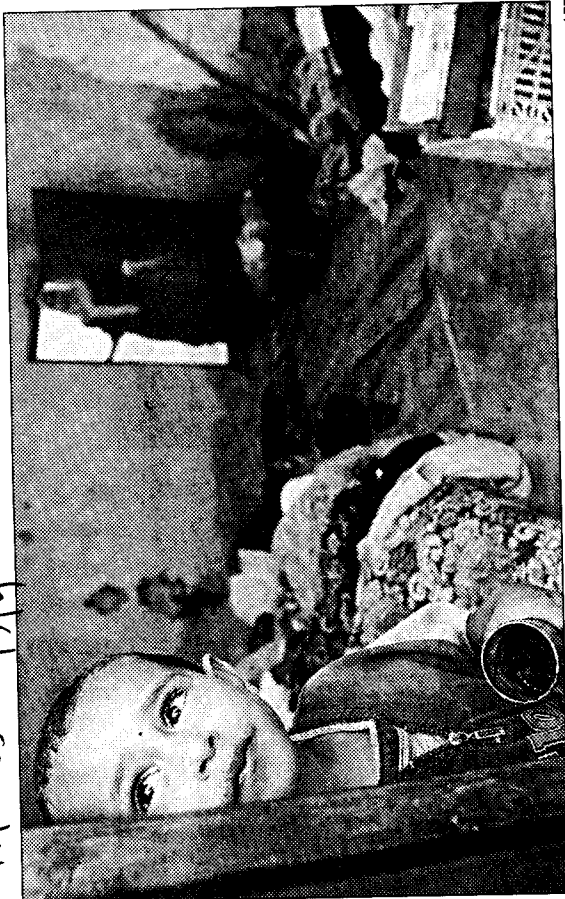
In a move that appeared to meet US demands half-way, the Palestinian Authority announced it would unify its security forces under a new national security council that will include Arafat and incoming Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Korei.

The US has demanded the consolidation of the security forces but also called for their removal from Arafat's control as part of a crackdown on militants mandated by the peace "roadmap".

The Cabinet meeting got under way after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon cut short a trip to India and hurried home in response to Tuesday's suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv.

An Israeli official said the ministers could decide on fresh air strikes against leaders of the Hamas, which claimed responsibility for Tuesday's blasts. There was also speculation in Israel over a possible Gaza Strip ground offensive.

The European Union agreed on Thursday to put Hamas on its blacklist of outlawed terrorist outfits, diplomats said. **Reuters**



AFP

A Palestinian boy watches as his parents remove their belongings from their house demolished by Israeli bulldozers in the Rafah refugee camp on Thursday.

Arafat, said Shalom's "threat...will harm efforts to revive peace".

A surge in tit-for-tat violence in a three-year-old Palestinian uprising for independence has drowned in blood a US-backed peace plan envisaging a Palestinian state by 2005.

Arafat, 74, has denied US and Israeli al-

Secret safe, Sharon sets off

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Sept. 10: Terrorism — the signature theme of Ariel Sharon's tour — compelled him to green-light from Indian soil a missile strike in Gaza and cut short his groundbreaking visit.

The Israeli Prime Minister skipped Mumbai and left a day before schedule this evening, but not before he won an assurance that India will neither initiate any anti-Israel resolution at the UN nor pass on sensitive Israeli technology to Iran, viewed by Tel Aviv as "the centre of world terror".

A trilateral axis between India, Israel and the US, more in the abstract than in the formal sense, was part of the agreement Sharon reached with the Indian leadership. The countries have a "mutual interest in making the world a more secure place for all of us. There is American support for development of this unwritten axis", Israeli deputy Prime Minister Yosef Lapid said.

But the tightrope walk continued on two Ps — Palestine and Pakistan.

In a cleverly-worded joint statement issued this evening, the two countries condemned "states and individuals who aid and abet terrorism across borders, harbour and provide sanctuary and provide them with financial means, training and patronage".

The references to "states" and "individuals" in the three-page Delhi Statement on Friendship and Cooperation and Agreement reflected the hard-nosed negotiations behind the scenes.

The statement addressed Israel's concerns on India's refusal to dump Yasser Arafat and its friendship with Syria and Iran. It also echoed India's problems with Pakistan. However, as an undeclared price for living with India's endorsement of Arafat, Israel refused to go out of its way to condemn Pakistan.

Senior Israeli officials said Tel Aviv was willing to work closely with Delhi to fight terror, but were not sure of the extent. Islamabad was involved in encouraging violence in Kashmir and

elsewhere in the country. They contended that the mountainous region bordering Pakistan was "very difficult to manage".

Another area the Israelis are watching with keen interest is India's growing ties with Iran.

India assured Sharon that the country had an impeccable record on non-proliferation. The sensitive technology India received from Tel Aviv will be used only to address security concerns and not passed on to a third country, Delhi added.

The assurance coincided with heightened activity today on defence deals in the pipeline between Israel and India (See Page 6). Lapid declared that Israel would sell three Phalcon airborne early warning systems to Delhi, drawing an immediate expression of concern from Pakistan.

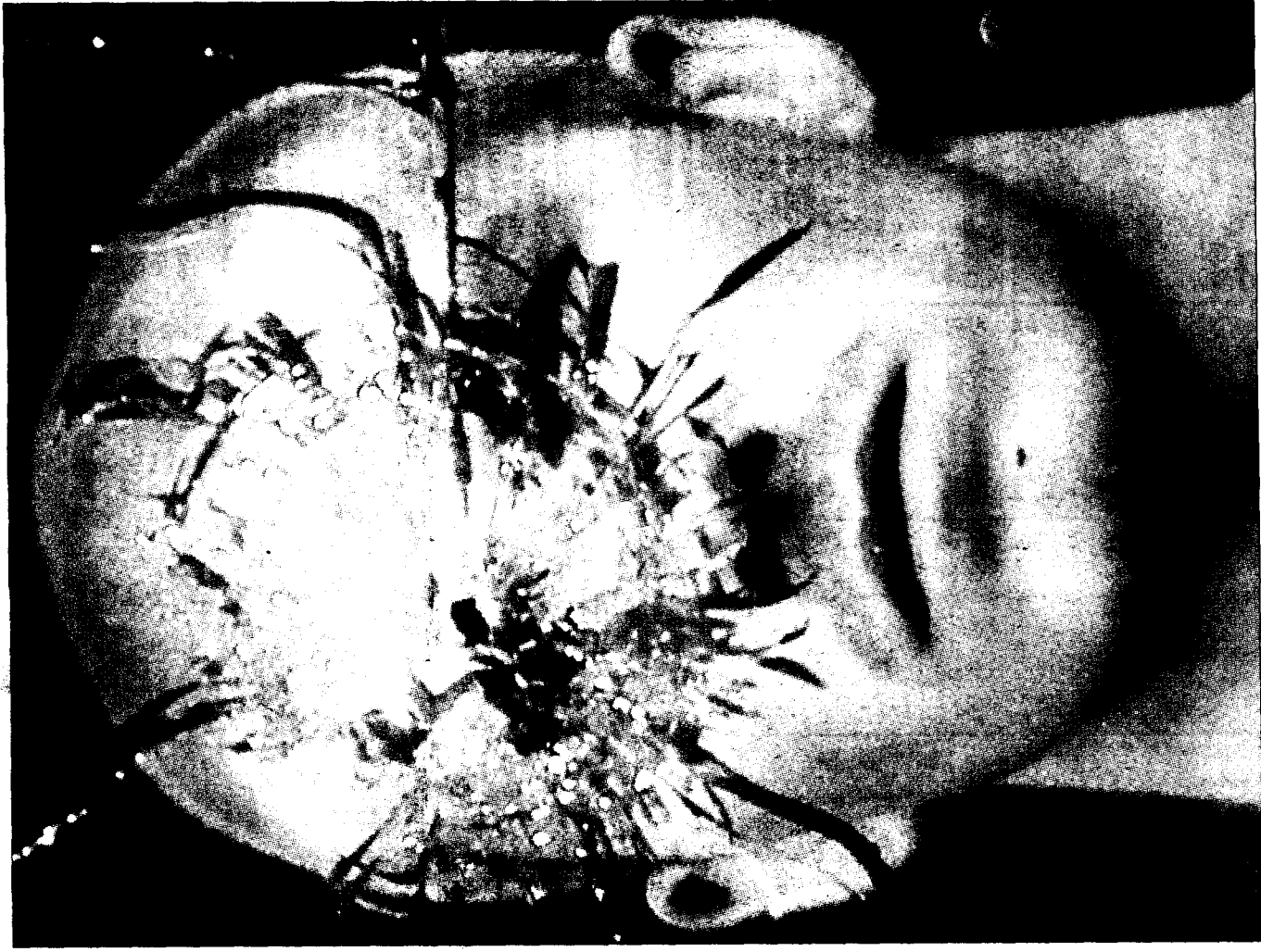
India, which restored full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, has not moved any anti-Israel resolution since 1994, though it has been one of the most vocal and consistent supporters of the Palestinian cause. Sharon has been assured that there would be no change in Delhi's position at the UN. The joint statement said Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee accepted "with pleasure" an invitation from Sharon to visit Israel. India also added in the statement the need, voiced yesterday by Vajpayee, for peace in West Asia.

But the spectre of terror lurked close by. Soon after the Israeli Prime Minister received word of the suicide strike near Tel Aviv last night, a hoax call sent into a tizzy the Delhi hotel where he was staying. The caller, who was arrested later and found to be unstable, said a Palestinian group was going to storm the hotel.

The crank call was followed by the news of another suicide strike in Israel, this time in Jerusalem, prompting the Israeli leadership to shorten the visit.

"We have to cut short our visit to India for the same reason that brought us here," Sharon's deputy Lapid said. Sharon was to visit Mumbai, racked by the twin blasts, tomorrow — the second anniversary of the September 11 strikes in the US.

11/9
TERROR IN TEL AVIV, TREMOR IN DELHI



The broken glass of an advertisement poster displaying the face of English soccer star David Beckham near a west Jerusalem cafe where a suicide bomber blew himself up on Tuesday night. The West Asia peace road map appeared in tatters after two Palestinian suicide bombers killed at least 15 Israelis in back-to-back attacks in Jerusalem and near Tel Aviv. Israel hit back with a warplane that narrowly missed a Hamas leader but killed his son and a bodyguard in Gaza on Wednesday. The Israel strikes prompted Ariel Sharon to cut short his visit to India. (AFP) ■ See Page 3

Mamata returns to brewing discontent

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, September 9

THE MURDER of a trusted aide and the brewing discontent among Trinamool MPs forced Mamata Banerjee to return to the city on Tuesday evening.

"The incidents at Bon-gaon, Singur and Chakdaha are all instances of CPI(M)'s bloody politics. They do not understand that nothing can be achieved by bloodshed," she said at the airport before rushing off to Nadia to attend Samir Nag's funeral.

Nag's murder, coming close on the heels of the untimely death of Trinamool MP Ananda Mohan Biswas, is a major blow to the party ahead of the polls.

But trouble was brewing on another front too — some MPs were convinced that Mamata had deliberately kept them out of the Cabinet by not suggesting their names to the Prime Minister. Mamata's second agenda is to call a parliamentary party meeting and nip the discontent in the bud.

While the Capital went into a tizzy on Monday speculating over which portfolio Mamata would finally bag, the speculation in Kolkata was that Mamata had invited a possible split in the Trinamool parliamentary par-



MINISTER ON FIRE: Mamata Banerjee speaks her mind at the airport on Tuesday.

ty by not taking her MPs into confidence and not calling them to the swearing-in ceremony.

"Some of them are saying that I should have invited all of them to Delhi. But then, my visit was not planned ahead. But that I did intend to take some of them is clear because I told some MPs to come to Delhi when I asked them. Too much is being read about Akbar Ali Khondkar

accompanying me to Delhi. This is foolish," Mamata said. But she refused to comment on her likely portfolio.

Meanwhile, news had reached Mamata that MPs Sudip Bandopadhyay, Ajit Panja and Bikram Sarkar, having been left out of the Cabinet, were bidding time. Rumours were also doing the rounds that Trinamool MPs, including Rajya Sabha MP Dinesh Trivedi, had

been sounded out by some BJP leaders. The Congress too had gone on an overdrive. Realising that Mamata's induction had created misgivings among some MPs, Congress leaders lost no time in getting in touch with them.

Mamata spoke to her MPs over phone on Monday, but she made it clear that she would not take any non-sense or tolerate a revolt.

HT Correspondents
Kolkata/Kalyani, September 9

THE CPI(M) on Tuesday denied involvement in the killing of Chakdah Trinamool president Samir Kumar Nag on Monday night, saying it was a result of rivalry within the Trinamool.

CPI(M) state secretary Anil Biswas blamed Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee for the incident. "Her supporters have been rejuvenated after she became a Union minister. That is why they have attacked us. We express sorrow over Nag's killing. But we are not involved in it," he said.

Nag was shot dead near the Dubra gram panchayat office by a group of about 10 criminals, immediately after the incident, there was violence in Chakdah. A mob ransacked houses and

shops, some of which were set ablaze. RAF was deployed in the area. CPI(M) sources alleged that the houses damaged by the mob belonged to party supporters and members.

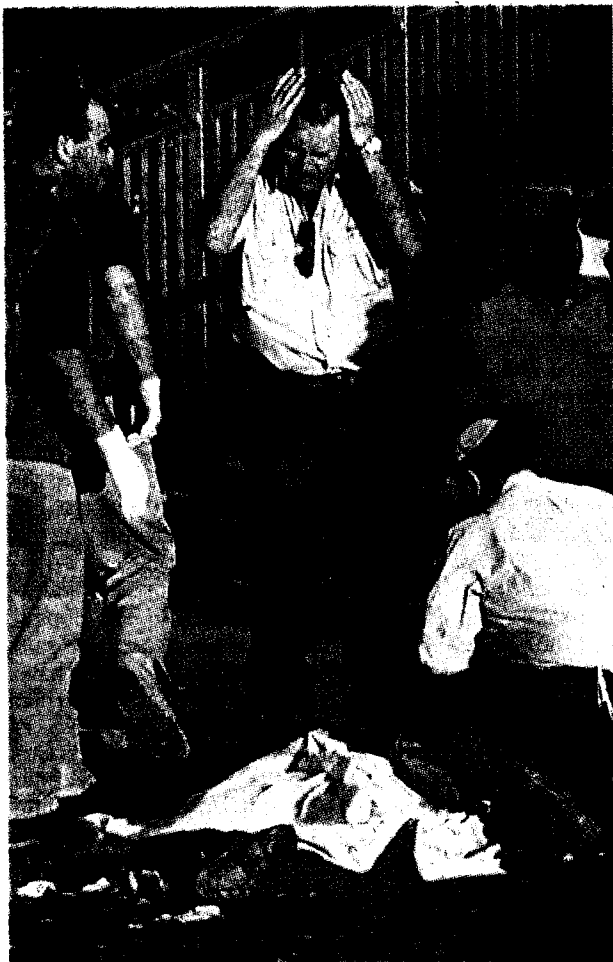
Kalyani SDPO Prasun Banerjee said 39 people had been arrested in connection with the incident.

Trinamool leaders Pankaj Banerjee and Partha Chatterjee visited Nag's home on Tuesday and met his family. Banerjee said this was a "political" murder and that the CPI(M) and police were involved in it. The police had withdrawn the security provided to Nag, he said.

The Trinamool chief is scheduled to visit Chakdah on Tuesday night immediately on her arrival from New Delhi, party general secretary Mukul Roy said.

Suicide blast near Israeli army camp kills 8

SF 3
199



Israeli securitymen check the body of a person killed in a Palestinian suicide attack close to Tsrifin, west of Tel Aviv, on Tuesday. — AFP

Press Trust of India

H. Asin

JERUSALEM, Sept. 9. — An explosion near an Israeli army base today killed at least eight people and injured dozens in an apparent suicide attack that Tel Aviv immediately blamed on Palestinian Authority and Hamas.

The attack came as Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon began a landmark visit to India where international terrorism was a major issue of discussion.

The suspected suicide bomb explosion occurred at a bus stop near the Tsrifin army base and the Assaf Harofeh hospital near the Tel Aviv suburb of Rishon Letzion. Security officials said there were many soldiers at the bus stop. Eight people, including the bomber, were killed in the suicide attack, according to the police in Tzrifin.

“The attack today is further indication that the Palestinian Authority is doing absolutely nothing whatsoever to reign in terrorists or to dismantle the terror infrastructure in their areas,” said Mr David Baker, an official in the Israeli PMO. Another official said Israel holds the leaders of Hamas “responsible for the slaughter.” Without claiming responsibility for the attack, Hamas’ political leader Abdelaziz Rantissi said that the bombing was a response to “Israeli crimes”. The attack follows Saturday’s failed attempt to assassinate Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the founder and spiritual leader of Hamas.

Later today, the Palestinian leadership condemned the suicide attack and appealed for a new ceasefire, adds AFP from Ramallah.

Qorei’s peace call: Palestinian Premier-designate Mr Ahmed Qorei has asked Israel to help relaunch the peace process in a message to Israeli Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon, the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* reported today, adds AFP. “The success of the peace process is contingent upon Israel’s policies and acts on the ground. If you want me to succeed — help me,” he said. /

10 SEP 2003

THE STATESMAN

Cornered by Arafat, Abbas quits

Huge jolt to peace roadmap

Ramallah, September 6

PALESTINIAN PRIME Minister Mahmoud Abbas, increasingly unpopular and worn out by a power struggle with Yasser Arafat, submitted his resignation Saturday, dealing a serious blow to a US-backed peace plan.

Arafat told lawmakers later on Saturday that Abbas now heads a caretaker government, implying that he had accepted the resignation. However, some Palestinian officials said that for that acceptance to become formal, Arafat would have to send a letter to Abbas — which he had not done.

Arafat also said he had called meetings for Sunday with his Fatah faction to begin discussions about the leadership crisis.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office warned it would not agree to Arafat heading the Palestinian government, and a senior Israeli official demanded that Arafat be sent into exile.

Abbas held office for only four turbulent months, and there was some uncertainty about whether his resignation was final.

Arafat delayed a decision on whether to accept the resignation, and one lawmaker suggested that Abbas's withdrawal was a tactical move to pressure Arafat to relinquish some authority.

Abbas told a closed-door session of Parliament that his decision was final. In a statement issued later, he listed a number of reasons for his resignation, includ-



THE HONEYMOON'S OVER: A file photograph of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, who resigned on Saturday.

ing what he said was Israel's unwillingness to implement its obligations in the peace "roadmap", and "harsh and dangerous domestic incitement against the government".

Lawmakers said Abbas was stung by accusations, including by leaders of the ruling Fatah party, that he betrayed the Palestinian cause. Arafat aides initially said the Palestinian leader had accepted the resignation, but Arafat adviser Nabil Abu Rdenneh later said

he was still studying Abbas's letter. If the resignation becomes final, Arafat would have three weeks to appoint a replacement.

The US State Department had no official comment. Israeli PM Sharon's office said in a statement that the resignation was an internal Palestinian matter, but that Israel "will not accept a state of affairs in which control over the Palestinian Authority reverts back to Yasser Arafat or one of his loyalists".

Hamas founder

Israeli helicopters fired missiles at a house in Gaza City on Saturday, wounding Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and 10 other people, witnesses said.

The missiles hit Yassin's apartment where he and another Hamas official, Ismail Hanieh, were at the time.

The Hamas founder, who is a quadriplegic, was lightly injured in the hand.

A dove backed by Bush and Sharon

Jerusalem, September 6

AFTER JUST four months in the job, Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas had had enough of the constant wrangling with Yasser Arafat.

Every step of the way, the two had argued over the division of authority, particularly over who should control the security forces, a key tool in implementing a US-backed peace plan.

Abbas' resignation on Saturday dealt a serious blow to peace efforts, leaving the US and Israel without a Palestinian leader to negotiate with. Both countries had hoped Abbas would rise as an alternative to veteran leader Arafat, whom they accuse of fomenting terrorism and blocking progress toward peace.

Abbas, who spent decades in Arafat's shadow as No. 2 in the Palestine Liberation Organization, was an outspoken critic of the three-year armed Palestinian uprising. His resignation removes from the scene the main Palestinian voice supporting the "road map" peace plan and opposing the use of terrorism.

The result could badly derail the West Asia peace strategy of US President George Bush. It could also end hopes of establishing a Palestinian state along provisional borders by as early as next year, as called for by the road map.

Since his confirmation by parliament on April 29, Abbas has struggled with a monumental task that some said was out of sync with his low-key personality and reputa-

tion for walking away from political confrontations.

His balancing act included dealing with Israeli demands that he crack down on militants without triggering civil war, easing powers away from Arafat without being accused of betraying a national symbol, and re-establishing trust with Israel after three years of violence.

Abbas has had a stormy relationship with Arafat over the years, and there have been long periods in which the two men refused to speak to each other. A devout Muslim, Abbas was born in 1935 in Sated, a hilltop town in what is now northern Israel.

Along with about 700,000 other Palestinians, Abbas and his family became refugees, fleeing to Syria during the 1948-49 war that created the Jewish state.

After helping found Fatah in 1965, Abbas managed finances for the movement, which became the core of the PLO. He distanced himself from the group's terror activities and remained in Syria when the PLO moved its base to Lebanon in the 1970s.

He became one of the first senior PLO officials to recognize Israel and led Palestinian negotiators in peace talks in the 1990s. He returned to the Palestinian territories in 1995 after the first Israel-PLO interim peace deal, and was made secretary general of the PLO's executive committee in 1996.

In 1995 he held talks with Israeli official Yossi Beilin that yielded a plan for a final peace settlement in which a Palestinian state would be established.

AP

Palestinian PM resigns

AGENCIES

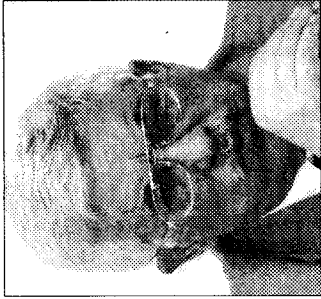
JERUSALEM, Sept. 6. — Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Mahmud Abbas today resigned following a power struggle with Mr Yasser Arafat over the control of Palestinian Authority's security services.

Mr Arafat accepted the resignation after initial delay, according to legislators and sources close to the Palestinian Authority Chairman. "Today, we lost an honest Prime Minister who only wanted to serve his people," a lawmaker quoted Mr Arafat as saying, while confirming that he had accepted the resignation.

Soon after Mr Abbas resigned, sources at Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office said Israel will not accept a situation in which PA is ruled by Mr Arafat or anyone of his choosing.

Mr Abbas, who was appointed by Mr Arafat last April under Israeli and US pressure, had previously threatened to quit without following through. He had been

CRACK TEAM



Mr Mahmud Abbas (left) and Mr Yasser Arafat

demanding full control of all the Palestinian security services, while Mr Arafat refused to yield and appointed Mr Jibril Rajoub as the national security adviser in a move considered as a direct challenge to Mr Abbas.

The Palestinian Premier, who was backed by Israel and the USA, told a closed-door session of parliament that his decision was final. In a statement, Mr Abbas listed a number of reasons for his resignation, including what he said was Israel's unwillingness to implement its obligations in the "road map" peace plan.

The Israeli PMO said the resignation was an internal Palestinian matter, but that Israel "will not accept a state of affairs in which control over the Palestinian Authority reverts back to Mr Yasser Arafat or one of his loyalists".

Hamas leader hurt: Hamas founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was wounded when Israeli helicopters fired missiles at Gaza City today, adds AP.

'Decision dangerous to peace process'

CAIRO, Sept. 6. — The Palestinian Prime Minister's decision to resign puts the West Asia peace process in dangerous straits, US, European and West Asian officials and analysts said today.

Arab League Secretary-General Mr Amr Moussa said Mr Mahmud Abbas' decision had set back the road map, but he also blamed Israel for the current crisis. "Yes, it's a step back, but the Israelis have stepped back several times already. There's nothing called the road map that is being implemented."

EU spokeswoman Ms Emma Udwin said the move could have "serious repercussions" for peace in West Asia.

US Secretary for Homeland Security Mr Tom Ridge said the resignation would not deter efforts to get Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, but "unfortunately, tragically, it will delay it". "There was great promise there, great hope there, but (Mr Abbas) was consistently being undermined by elements within the Palestinian Authority... Mr Arafat has not been a partner in this effort, has not provided a path to peace," Mr Ridge said.

Egyptian foreign minister Mr Ahmed Maher, said his government would try to "help the Palestinian leadership end its crisis".

Swedish foreign minister Ms Anna Lindh blamed both Mr Arafat and Israel for the resignation of Mr Abbas. — AP

Back me or sack me, says Abbas

Ramallah, Sept. 4 (Reuters): Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, struggling to win more power from Yasser Arafat and push a US-backed plan for peace with Israel, called on Palestinian lawmakers today to back him or sack him.

Pledging his commitment to salvage the battered West Asian "road map", Abbas sought new security powers he sees as vital to diplomacy but which the Palestinian President has been reluctant to give him, officials said.

Abbas, 68, appointed by Arafat in April under international pressure but lacking his rival's grass-roots popularity, stopped short of asking for a vote of confidence.

But as Arafat supporters staged anti-Abbas protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, parliamentary speaker Ahmed Korei said 15 out of the 85 law-

makers had filed a petition asking for such a vote. There was no immediate decision on the request.

Abbas' removal by parliament, which is dominated by Arafat loyalists, could doom the US-brokered road map already under threat from fresh bloodshed and the cancellation of a ceasefire by Islamic militants.

Throwing down a gauntlet to lawmakers, Abbas said power-sharing problems needed to be urgently addressed and he was ready to leave office if he did not get his way.

"Either provide the possibility of strong support for carrying out (the mandate) or you can take it back," Abbas said in a speech to the Palestinian Legislative Council while dozens of demonstrators stood outside chanting slogans against him.

Speaking in even tones,

Abbas blamed Israel for a lack of progress in peace moves and said the US had done too little to restrain the Israeli army. "We...reiterate that we will continue our efforts to restore calm," he said.

The power struggle between Abbas and Arafat has centred on Abbas' demand, backed by the US, for control over the security forces who are crucial for reining in militants as required by the road map. Arafat has retained authority over most security services, drawing US and Israeli accusations that he is trying to undermine his reform-minded Prime Minister.

But a leaflet distributed by Fatah's Ramallah branch accused Abbas' administration of acting like a US and Israeli puppet and called for its removal.

In an apparent bid to defuse the crisis, lawmakers voted to

hold a closed-door session on Saturday to hear Abbas' account of his dispute with Arafat.

Underlining Abbas' woes, a militant group affiliated with the Fatah faction, in which both he and Arafat hold leadership roles, was one of the groups that claimed joint responsibility for a West Bank ambush just before parliament met.

An Israeli army spokesman said Palestinian gunmen opened fire on a patrol carrying out arrests in the West Bank town of Jenin, killing a soldier.

Abbas said he would seek a return to implementation of the road map, which outlines reciprocal steps to end almost three years of violence since the Palestinians began an uprising against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

By Axa (w)

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Abbas seeks 'independence' to put peace plan in place

Associated Press

RAMALLAH, Sept. 4. — Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Mahmud Abbas, weakened by his power struggle with Mr Yasser Arafat, told parliament today it must either support him or send him home, saying he would not put up a fight to keep what he described as an impossibly difficult job.

Mr Abbas suggested the Palestinians can only hope to make progress on the US-backed "road map" peace plan if he is given the full power to implement it, but stopped short of seeking a vote of confidence today.

Eighteen of the 83 legislators signed a petition calling for such a vote, and the parliament speaker, Mr Ahmed Qureia, was to consider the request. Mr



Qureia had said yesterday he opposed holding a vote, arguing that parliament should not be dragged into the struggle between Mr



Abbas and Mr Arafat.

Mr Abbas, who has minimal support among Palestinians, could be toppled in a confidence vote, deal-

ing a heavy blow to efforts to end three years of violence and move toward Palestinian statehood.

In his speech to parliament, Mr Abbas only hinted at his conflict with Mr Arafat, saying there were "problems" between his government and the Palestinian leadership. Backed by America Mr Abbas demands that Mr Arafat relinquish control over security forces. For now,

each leader commands four of the armed services, and Mr Arafat has balked at giving up one of his last vestiges of power.

Mr Abbas told parliament that "without a legitimate force in the hands of one authority... we will not advance one step on the political track". America and Israel demand that the Palestinians begin dismantling armed groups, as required by the road map. Mr

Abbas, however, told parliament today that he had no intention of ordering a clampdown. "This government... not deal with the opposition groups with a policing mentality, but with a mentality of dialogue."

US-backed peace plan is dead, says Arafat

Jerusalem: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Wednesday was quoted as saying that the US-backed "roadmap" for peace in West Asia is dead and that Israel is to blame. The plan, launched on June 4, calls on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to end nearly three years of violence and envisions the establishment of a Palestinian state by 2005.



Yasser Arafat

The plan has been stalled for several weeks because of renewed fighting and a deadlock between Israel and the Palestinians on the dismantling of armed groups. Israel has accused Mr Arafat of getting in the way of the roadmap and trying to undermine his prime minister, the US-backed Mahmoud Abbas, at every turn. The CNN website on Wednesday quoted Mr Arafat as saying the peace plan has no future. "The roadmap is dead, but only because of Israeli military aggression in recent weeks," Mr Arafat said.

Meanwhile, Mr Abbas, locked in a power struggle with Mr Arafat, will tell parliament on Thursday he will quit unless he wins authority to take key peace steps, a Palestinian minister said. "Abbas will ask for support for his policies or he leaves," Palestinian information minister Nabil Amr told Reuters on Wednesday in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

The moderate premier will address parliament on Thursday to report on his performance four months after Mr Arafat appointed him under international pressure for an end to almost three years of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Disputes with Mr Arafat have bogged down Mr Abbas's campaign for reforms, including a crackdown on militant factions, crucial to a peace plan with Israel.

Mr Arafat has denied Israeli and US accusations of fomenting militant violence and obstructing the peace plan, but has refused to cede control to Mr Abbas of Palestinian security forces seen as indispensable to reining in militants. AP

'We are not terrorists'

— Palestinian Foreign Minister

By Amit Baruah

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w/ Arun (M)

THE PALESTINIAN Foreign Minister, Nabil Sha'ath, a Ph.D from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, U.S., is both articulate and forceful in what he says. Describing *The Hindu* as the "Le Monde of India," the Minister has no hesitation in dealing with difficult questions. Clearly aware that his is a delicate mission preceding the visit of the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, to India, Dr. Sha'ath is open and direct about his concerns. The 65-year-old Dr. Sha'ath, who took over in April this year, has worked as consultant to several Arab Governments and has been involved in complex negotiations with the Israelis over the years. Dr. Sha'ath stated that the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, promised him that he would telephone the Palestinian leadership after Mr. Sharon's visit was over.

The following is the text of the interview:

Amit Baruah: Do you see any links between the Iraq and the Palestinian issues? How do you see the situation in Iraq?

Nabil Sha'ath: Iraq is a tragic situation. It was tragic before the Occupation because of a very dictatorial regime. The Occupation resulted in a quick military victory, but making peace is something else. Now Iraq has gone to pieces — Shiites, Sunnites — and now you see the car bombings. You see the daily lawlessness. There is a need to rebuild Iraq and to provide a solution.

Going to the United Nations will probably help — ending American Occupation, transferring responsibility to the United Nations which will eventually allow free, independent elections to bring about a sovereign, Iraqi Government. But that's going to take time.

(As for) the link with Palestine, immediately after the American victory in Iraq, the Americans felt very much the need to score a victory for peace in the area. Therefore, there was this sudden, urgent pressure by Mr. (George) Bush to implement the road map (towards a Palestinian state). This was no coincidence. There is this link. The question is how does this link continue? Will it continue positively or negatively? It is difficult to predict. On the one hand, the continued trouble in Iraq might weaken

President Bush — weaken his ability to get what he wants especially from Israel. At the same time, this is a vicious circle. If it turns into success, then there is a benevolent circle. That is if the United States goes back to the United Nations, the U.N. takes over; if a U.N. force produces law and order

INTERVIEW

then the lesson to send multinational forces to Palestine becomes more urgent. And we feel that international presence in Palestine today might be really the single most important requirement for peace.

There is this debate about sending troops to Iraq. A school of thought believes that until and unless the Americans hand over some military authority to the U.N., law and order may be difficult to secure in Iraq. Do you agree with this view?

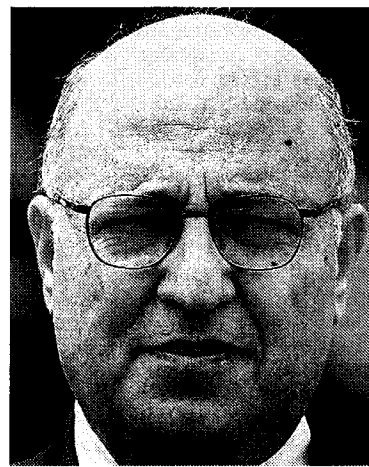
I agree.

In your press conference in New Delhi, you referred to the issues of terrorism and national liberation. The Government of India also took up the issue of terrorism in its discussions with you. Has there been any damage to your cause?

Absolutely. Bus bombings always hurt us. We always condemn them. We have absolutely no willingness to accept them as a legitimate tool for struggle. But what I said is that you cannot use this against the whole Palestinian resistance movement. You cannot just dub the whole resistance movement as terrorism because of these particular acts of bombings. When you talk about these acts of bombings, which we call terroristic by the way, also refer to what the Israelis have been doing. This was my only plea. I was not justifying bus demolitions and suicide attacks at all. I was only saying don't use them as a label to label all Palestinian struggle and don't forget Israel's state terrorism.

There are real definitional problems of terrorism. Would you say there are real, root causes for terrorism?

When you talk of the generalised question of terrorism, no, I see no justification for generalised terrorism. It does nothing but destroy the world. Between Casablanca, Riyadh, Indonesia and New York, what the hell is going on? Bombay (Mumbai) and Najaf. This is nothing but de-



Nabil Sha'ath

struction. Even terrorism in our own situation, that is, proper terrorism like blowing civilian buses... we are against this.

Indian officials have been calling for close cooperation between India, the United States and Israel on the issue of terrorism. How would you respond to that?

I disagree with that. I know it is the position of some of your Ministers. First of all, I see no need to go to Israel to reach the United States. The United States is open to India. I don't think you need that intermediary. Many people who felt that Israel was the address for the United States failed. And I give the example of Central and Eastern Europe. They all went to Israel to seek relations with the United States; they found it much easier to approach NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) than to approach Israel to do their bidding. Secondly, again, Israel would like to make it look like all the resistance it is facing from the Palestinians is terrorism, to make it look like 9/11, which is false. Identifying with that puts you in a position of being anti-Palestinian when there is no need to do so. Being against what happened in New York and Washington is universal. President (Yasser) Arafat gave his blood to the New York victims hours after the horrible incident in New York. Why? Indonesia was not subject to terrorism? Morocco was not subject to terrorism? Why just pick Israel? Palestinians were not subject to terrorism?

India has a growing relationship

with the United States. Did you ask India to use its good offices on behalf of the Palestinians with the U.S.?

I did not really make any special request, for any special offices. I explained our position; I sought Indian support. I did not see it appropriate to tell my Indian interlocutors what to do in their bilateral relations. But I did make clear what it is that we need.

Do you see any special significance in the fact that the Israeli President, Ariel Sharon, will be in New Delhi on September 11? Is there any message being sent out by the two countries through this date?

Probably this is the way he (Mr. Sharon) picked it. I am not so sure this is what India chose. But this is what Mr. Sharon picked. His propagandists are very busy trying to pick symbols of always linking him with 9/11. As a victim, of course.

You seem to have put some faith in President Bush and the road map. June 2005 is one deadline in that road map. Do you really believe that this deadline will be met? Will peace in Palestine signal hope for peace in the rest of the world?

Look, there is a difference between wanting something, working for it and making a proper forecast about how it will work. I think the road map is a very good programme of action to support. If it will work, it will produce a lot of good for our people, therefore, for the whole world. Will it work is a combination of what we do, the Israelis do, what the Americans do. If the Americans say they are committed and I think they are, if we are committed and we should work on that commitment, that's two out of three. The international community is behind President Bush. And, I think Israel will be really isolated if it alone were to destroy the road map. It will not openly try to destroy the road map, but it will do everything possible to procrastinate, to waste time, to create problems that give it some justification that it is not something what it has done; only responding to what the Palestinians have done. Typical ploys Israel has played. Will the United States be able, nevertheless, to prevail to get Israel to move is a moot question. If I were a journalist today, I would say no, it doesn't look very hopeful. As a politician, I have got to give it a real effort.

Four held for Najaf blast

ASSOCIATED PRESS

NAJAF (Iraq), Aug. 30. — Iraqi police have arrested four men in connection with the bombing of Iraq's most holy Shi'ite Muslim shrine, and all four have connections to Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaida terror network, a senior police officer said today.

The officer, who said the death toll in the bombing had risen to 107, said the four arrested men, two Iraqis and two Saudis, were caught shortly after the car bombing that also killed one of the most important Shi'ite clerics in Iraq, Ayatollah Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim.

The police officer, who led the initial investigation and interrogation of the captives, said the prisoners told of other plots to kill political and religious leaders and to damage vital installations such as electricity generation plants, water supplies and oil pipelines.

The officer said the bomb at the Imam Ali shrine was made from the same type of materials used in the 19 August bombing at the UN headquarters in Baghdad, in which at least 23 people died, and the Jordanian Embassy attack on 7 August in which 19 had died.

He said the men arrested after the attack claimed the recent bombings were designed to "keep Iraq in a state of chaos so that police and American forces are unable to focus attention" on the country's porous borders, across which suspected foreign fighters



An Iraqi Shi'ite Muslim crowd shouts slogans against the USA and former Saddam Hussein regime outside Shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf on Saturday. — AFP

Bush expands authority to seize assets

WASHINGTON, Aug. 30. — Mr George W Bush has expanded his authority to seize assets of former Iraqi senior officials and their relatives to help in the rebuilding of Iraq. "I find that the removal of Iraqi property from that country by certain senior officials of the former Iraqi regime and their immediate family members constitutes one of these obstacles. "I further determine that the USA is engaged in armed hostilities and that it is in the interest of the USA to confiscate certain additional property of the former Iraqi regime, certain senior officials of the former regime, immediate family members of those officials, and controlled entities," Mr Bush said in an executive order released by the White House yesterday.

Meanwhile, a former technician for the Fox News television channel who smuggled a dozen paintings from an Iraqi presidential palace into the USA was sentenced to one year of probation and fined \$2,000. — Agencies

are said to be infiltrating.

Iran in mourning: Iran today entered three days of national mourning over the top Iraqi Shi'ite leader's death, AFP adds

from Teheran.

US soldiers injured: Seven US soldiers were wounded today when their vehicles hit a mine near Iraq's border with Syria.

THE STATESMAN

3 1 AUG 2003

Palastine plays down Israel visit

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Aug. 27: India's growing ties with Israel and the forthcoming visit of Ariel Sharon, the first ever by a Prime Minister from Tel Aviv, have not gone down well with the Arab world and sections within the country. But the Palestinians seem least bothered.

"Hundreds of Sharons can come visiting. As long as India continues to support our cause, there is nothing to suggest that there has been a change in India's position," Palestinian ambassador Osama Musa said.

"Maybe India will take this opportunity and tell Sharon to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine and perhaps this will create the situation for peace to return to the Middle East," he added.

Sharon's visit, scheduled for

the second week of September, has upset some in the country. They feel the Israeli Prime Minister's first-ever tour was a clear signal that India was trying to abandon its traditional friend, Palestine, for new ally Israel. But the ambassador put such speculation to rest.

"So far there have been 18 resolutions in the UN on the Middle East. And every time India has supported the Palestinians," Musa said.

Pointing out that India's traditional stand was being continued by the BJP-led NDA in Delhi, the ambassador added: "A few months back we were gifted prime land in Chanakyapuri (the diplomatic enclave) by the government so that we can build our own embassy. We are grateful for this warm and friendly gesture from the Indian government and the people in this country."

His confidence might have

sprung from the apparent balancing act India has lined up to keep both Israel and Palestine happy.

Before Sharon embarks on his official visit, Palestinian foreign minister Nabil Sha'ath will touch down in Delhi. When he arrives this Friday on a three-day visit, Delhi will roll out the red carpet by giving access to the top tier of the Indian leadership.

He is expected to meet President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and perhaps also finance minister Jaswant Singh and defence minister George Fernandes. Foreign minister Yashwant Sinha is the only key figure whom Sha'ath will not be able to meet as he is out on a three-nation tour.

Musa stated that ties between his country and India were such that if for six months there were

no visits from either side, questions would be raised on whether anything was amiss. "Our foreign minister will explain our stand on what is holding back peace from returning to the Middle East," he said.

The NDA has made no bones about its affinity with Israel since coming to power. Advani, as home minister, and Singh, as foreign minister, visited Israel in 2000 to signal the importance Delhi attaches to its growing ties with Tel Aviv.

Neither visit was without controversy. The Arab world was unhappy with Advani's reported remarks on nuclear cooperation with Israel.

Later, Singh raised hackles by arguing that India could not improve relations with Israel as leaders of the Nehruvian era did not want to do anything to hurt the sentiments of Muslims in the country.

Israeli forces kill four Hamas militants in Gaza airstrike

Gaza City: The militant group Hamas promised revenge on Monday after Israel killed four of its members in a missile strike and declared anyone in the group was a legitimate target for "liquidation."

With Palestinian leaders stuck in a power struggle over control of their security forces, Palestinian officials warned that Sunday night's airstrike—part of Israel's response to a suicide bombing last week that killed 21 people—would undermine efforts to rein in militants, a key requirement in a fading US-backed peace plan. "If the Israelis thought assassinations would destroy our determination to continue in our resistance, to continue defending ourselves, they are mistaken," Hamas spokesman Ismail Haniya said. "We will move ahead whatever the sacrifice."

The Hamas military wing, Izzedine al Qassam, issued a statement promising revenge. "Our response will be painful and quick," it said in the statement faxed to The Associated Press in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat appointed Jibril Rajoub to the vacant post of national security adviser, his latest move to outflank US-backed Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas in a struggle over control of security forces. Mr Abbas and his security chief, Mohammed Dahlan, have said they need to control all security forces to confront the militants. But Mr Arafat has refused to hand over key units and has

tried to have a loyalist, Gen. Nasser Yousef, appointed to the powerful post of interior minister.

A meeting in Ramallah broke up late Sunday with no decision on the issue. Saying the Palestinians have failed to crack down on militants, Israel has renewed its policy of hunting down and killing militant leaders. In Gaza City on Sunday night, witnesses said Apache helicopters fired at least three missiles at a group of armed men near a crowded beach front, killing four members of Hamas' military wing and wounding more than a dozen bystanders.

Some of the victims were decapitated by the assault, which took place just 100 metres from the Gaza City office of Palestinian security chief Mohammed Dahlan. "The first missile hit the car, four people fled the car and then three more missiles were fired at them... It was difficult to look at the scene," said Abdel Salam Abu Askar, a Palestinian journalist and eyewitness. Israeli security officials said one of the dead, Ahmed



A Palestinian holds up the blood-stained shirt of one of the four Palestinians killed in an Israeli attack in Gaza City on Sunday.

Aishtawi, was a top operative who had planned and executed attacks in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

A Hamas spokesman said Aishtawi was the leader of a unit that had pioneered the firing of homemade rockets into Israel and at Jewish settlements in Gaza. Meanwhile, in the West Bank city of Hebron, police and soldiers removed some 50 Jewish settlers and a trailer from a site known as Worshippers Way, police said. Five settlers who refused to go were arrested, police said. Since November, when an Islamic Jihad ambush in the area killed 12 security guards and soldiers, settlers have repeatedly tried to set up an illegal outpost.

Under intense US pressure

to carry out commitments under the roadmap peace plan, Israel has dismantled several West Bank outposts but has failed to freeze construction at established settlements and to remove dozens of other illegal outposts as the plan demands. Israel, meanwhile, has stepped up army sweeps through West Bank towns following a Hamas suicide bombing on a bus in Jerusalem that killed 21 people last Tuesday.

Troops have been searching house-to-house for fugitives and weapons, sparking clashes. Dozens of tanks and armoured vehicles also have gathered along the Gaza border, apparently ready for an order to raid the coastal strip. AP

Teheran sees 'plot' in ex-envoy's arrest

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, AUG 25. A diplomatic row has broken out between Britain and Iran over the arrest here last week of a former Iranian Ambassador to Argentina, Hade Soleimanpur, in connection with the bombing of a Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires in 1994 in which 85 people were killed.

The Iranian Government has reacted with anger and demanded an apology from Bri-

tanian foreign office and told that Britain must use its influence with Argentina to have the case dropped.

Mr. Gould was quoted as saying that he assured the Iranian authorities that Mr. Soleimanpur's arrest was not politically motivated but "part of a judicial process". The Iranian radio said a "new plot is being hatched against Iran by the triangle of America, Britain and Israel with the cooperation of Argentina". Mr. Soleimanpur, who ar-

rived in Britain in February on a student visit, was arrested last Thursday following an extradition request from the Argentinian Government, which has been given until Sept. 20 to file extradition papers to Britain.

He has consistently denied the allegation and told the police at the time of his arrest that he was being held on a 'false' charge. The row comes at a time when the diplomatic relations between London and Teheran had started to improve.

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① **Arafat names Rajoub national security adviser** 60-12
2/98

RAMALLAH, Aug. 25. The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, has appointed a national security adviser, in an apparent move to outflank his U.S.-backed Prime Minister in a power struggle over control of security forces.

Brig. Gen. Jibril Rajoub, a former security chief in the West Bank who had good relations with the United States and Israel, said on Monday he accepted the post. Mr. Arafat and the Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, have been clashing over Mr. Arafat's refusal to relinquish control over security forces.

Mr. Abbas and his security chief, Mohammed Dahlan, have said they need control over all security forces to confront militants, a key demand in a U.S.-backed peace plan that envisions Palestinian statehood by 2005.

The United States has pressed for Arafat to relinquish control of the security forces, making a rare plea to the 74-year-old leader following a deadly suicide bombing in Jerusalem last week. The Hamas bombing killed 21 bus riders, including five Americans.

Rather than give into the demand, Mr. Arafat turned to Mr. Rajoub, whom he fired from his role as West Bank security chief

in July 2002 after an argument. At the time, Mr. Arafat tried to punch Mr. Rajoub and pointed his pistol at him. But Mr. Rajoub and Mr. Dahlan are also adversaries and it appears Mr. Arafat is trying to use Mr. Rajoub in his campaign to undermine Mr. Abbas' fledgling government.

Asked if he will start cracking down on militants in his new role, Mr. Rajoub told The Associated Press: "Lets wait and see. We're still starting up. A national security council will be formed under the leadership of Arafat and it will oversee the reform of the security forces and its leadership and it will oversee the cooperation with the Quartet," Mr. Rajoub said, referring to the four bodies — the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia — overseeing implementation of the so-called "road map" peace plan.

Mr. Rajoub said he and Mr. Dahlan would be equal members of the national security council and would share authority, as would other members. Mr. Abbas' office refused to comment on the newest appointment, apparently waiting to see whether Mr. Arafat was trying to reassert his authority through Mr. Rajoub. — AP

'50 Taliban men killed'

KABUL, AUG. 25. Afghan troops backed by U.S.-led forces killed up to 50 suspected Taliban fighters today in ground and air raids in the violence-wracked southeastern Afghanistan, a local official said.

"In this operation 40 to 50 Taliban were killed and their bodies are still laying on the ground," a spokesman for the Zabul provincial government, Ahmadullah Watan Dost, told AFP by satellite telephone.

Some 1,000 Afghan soldiers supported by dozens of U.S.-led coalition troops were on the first day of an anti-extremist operation in Zabul's Daychopan district, 300 km southwest of Kabul. The operation was executed against suspected Taliban and Al-Qaeda bases in Daychopan's Dozi mountains, Mr. Watan Dost said. The bases were "smashed to dust" by coalition bombing, he said, adding that there were no reported Afghan or coalition casualties. "In this operation coalition forces helped up with their close air support and they bombed the Taliban bases and smashed them to dust," he said.

Five suspected Taliban fighters were also arrested. The U.S. military was not available for comment. It was impossible to independently verify details in the remote area. The operation was launched after at least 14 people were killed in fighting over the weekend in Zabul and Uruzgan provinces. — AFP

SEE FINDO

26 AUG 2003

Coalition forces responsible for Iraq security, says Annan

United Nations: UN secretary-general Kofi Annan has said that both the United States and the United Nations made mistakes in Iraq but stressed that the ultimate responsibility for a secure environment in Iraq lies with the US-led coalition forces. He rejected the idea of sending UN peacekeepers "at this stage."

Mr Annan, who on Wednesday vowed that the UN would remain in Iraq to help restore peace and stability, told the Security Council he was surprised by reports that the world body had turned down an offer for increased protection around its mission in Baghdad. "It is those who have the responsibility for security and law and order, who have intelligence, determine what action is taken. I don't know if the UN did turn down an offer of protection. If it did, it



Kofi Annan attends a candlelight vigil outside the UN office on Wednesday in honour of those killed in the bomb attack.

was not correct." But he asserted that even if UN had turned down the offer of protection, "they (the coalition) should not have allowed it to turn it down."

"We all live in this city (New

York). Nobody tells you if you want the police to patrol your neighbourhood. They make an assessment that patrol and protection is needed. And that's what should be done in Iraq," he

later told reporters.

Nation building, Mr Annan said, is a tough assignment. But "when you have this kind of terrorist attack and the people perpetrating the attack are prepared to die, providing security and protection is extremely difficult." In a complex operation like one in the Iraq, he stressed, one has to do planning ahead. "I think there have been some wrong assumptions all along. The coalition has made some mistakes, and may be we have made some mistakes too."

The key players involved in rebuilding Iraq's devastated economy, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, have pulled their staff out of Iraq. "The bank has suspended operations in Iraq, given the security situation", World Bank spokesman said. Agencies

W. Asian (N)
UN

Israeli missile strike kills Hamas leader

Eric Silver in Jerusalem & agencies

Aug. 21. — A top Hamas leader, Ismail Abu Shanab, and his two bodyguards were killed when an Israeli plane fired missiles at his station wagon in Gaza City today.

Medical officials said 14 people were wounded, four of them seriously, in the air raid, which came after the Israeli government announced it would exact military reprisals for a suicide bombing on Tuesday in Jerusalem that killed 20 people.

Threatening retaliation for the raid, Hamas said it would pull out of the three-month unilateral cease-fire declared on 29 June. "We consider ourselves free from this cease-fire," a Hamas official said.

In Hebron, Israeli troops today demolished the home



Palestinians pull out bodies from the car of a Hamas leader, Ismail Abu Shanab, after it was attacked by an Israeli air strike in Gaza City on Thursday. (inset) The Hamas leader killed in the attack. — AFP

of a suicide bomber who blew himself up on a crowded bus in Jerusalem on Tuesday. Meanwhile, both Israel, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and the Palestinian Authority have declared war on infantry into Nablus and

other West Bank and Gaza towns to root out terrorists. The early signs suggested that these were limited penetrations rather than an invasion like "Operation Defensive Shield" last year.

The Israeli government announced that it would resume the controversial "targeted killings" of Hamas and Islamic Jihad commanders. Many of them were reported to have gone underground.

Last night, the Palestinian Cabinet voted unanimously to launch a "protracted campaign of political, security and operational measures" against the radical groups. After an emergency meeting in Gaza, a senior official said: "The Palestinian Authority will allow any faction or individual to harm our cause as they did on Tuesday."

W Asia (W) H.D. 15

21/8
Attacks part of spiralling campaign?

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, AUG. 20. The killing of 20 people, including the top United Nations diplomat, Sergio Vieira de Mello, in a truck bombing in Baghdad on Tuesday appears to part of a widening terror campaign that is rocking large parts of West Asia. The casualties in the Canal Hotel compound, the headquarters of the U.N., resulted from explosives detonating inside a truck which had ploughed through one of its walls. The explosives inside the truck were apparently covered by cement.

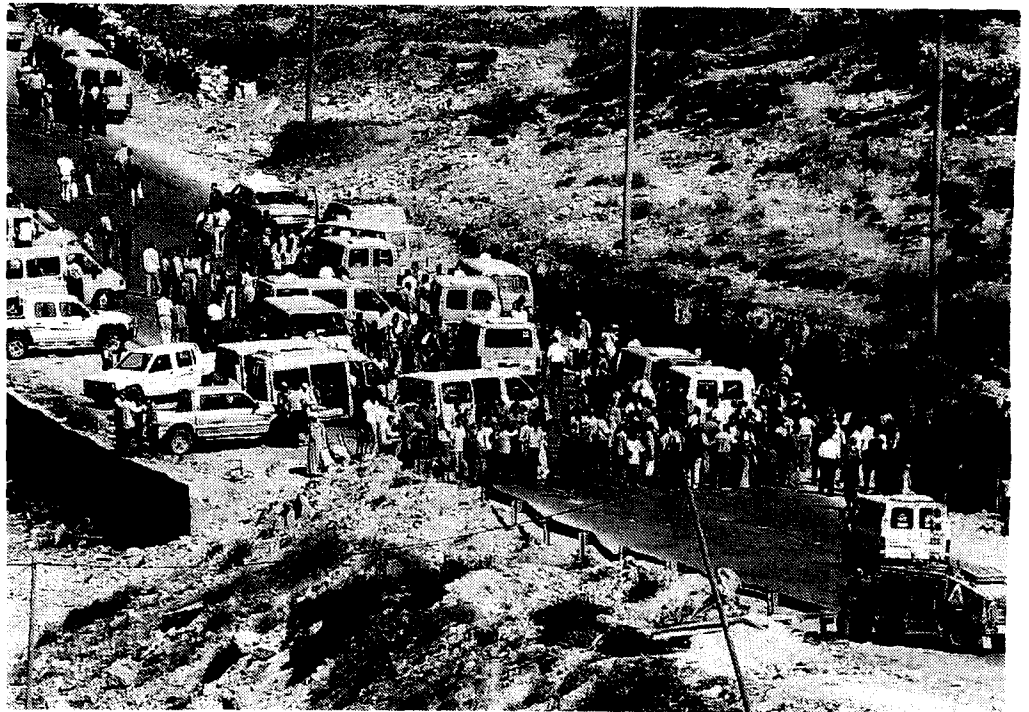
Tuesday also saw the late evening bombing of a bus in Jerusalem in which 20 people, including children and toddlers were killed and around 118 injured.

Apart from Iraq and Israel, extremist violence in recent months has acquired a higher profile in Saudi Arabia, the largest country in the Persian Gulf, while Monday's newspapers in Teheran reported that Iran had foiled several attempts by the Al-Qaeda network to strike on its soil.

Saudi Arabia is in the grip of a grim battle with extremists, suspected of mostly belonging to the Al-Qaeda. Saudi Arabia launched a counter terror offensive after May 12 when the Al-Qaeda struck simultaneously in four different locations in Riyadh, killing at least 35 people and injuring scores of others. But, the battle against extremist violence in Saudi Arabia still appears hanging in the balance.

Last week, three Saudi policemen lost their lives during a raid on Al-Qaeda suspects in a Riyadh residential district. This incident prodded the Crown Prince Abdullah, the country's de facto ruler, to take the unprecedented step of seeking public support against the menace.

In a television address, he warned that 'terrorists' and their sympathisers would be treated alike. Saudi Arabia's apex religious authority, which



Palestinians wait while Israeli soldiers close the Surda junction, the northern entrance of Ramallah, on Wednesday, as part of the measures taken by Israel after a suicide attack in Jerusalem the previous day. — AP

has a nation-wide following, echoed the Crown Prince's call. The 17-member council of senior Islamic scholars, headed by the Grand Mufti Abdel Aziz Al-Sheikh, described terror attacks as "serious criminal acts" that "warrant severe and deterrent punishment."

The Saudi authorities are likely to focus their attention on the mountains of Asir Province that border Yemen.

The area has become one of the hubs of Al-Qaeda activity and from where its influence appears to have radiated across the relatively porous borders towards Yemen and then southwards in the direction of Kenya and Somalia.

The Al-Qaeda has apparently acquired a large following along the fishing villages located between Somalia's Kismayo port and Ras Karboni near the Kenyan border.

In Iraq, resistance to the U.S.

occupation is rising, and has been intense in Anbar province, west of Baghdad, Diyala province with Baquba in its centre, to the east, as well as Mosul to the north.

An escalation in violence has become visible after the killing of Uday and Qusai, sons of the former Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, late last month.

The bombing of Canal Hotel on Tuesday coincided with another high profile event — the arrest of the former Iraqi Vice-President, Taha Yassin Ramadan, though it is not clear whether the attack on the U.N. headquarters was in retaliation to this event.

The spurt in violence and sabotage, where Iraqi infrastructure such as oil and water pipelines have been targeted, have been followed by a fresh propaganda offensive.

The *Al Arabiya* television channel, broadcast two messag-

es earlier this week, which had Iraq as their main theme. One of them was attributed to Izzat Ibrahim, the Interior Minister in the Ba'athist regime, who swore, "no one will be left at peace as long as Uday and Qusai are not avenged."

The same network on Monday broadcast an audio tape recording attributed to Abu Abdel Rahman al-Najdi, an Al-Qaeda leader, that called upon Iraqis to continue to resist the U.S.-led occupation.

It also had the "morale-boosting" line that the Al-Qaeda chief, Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban head, Mullah Omar, were in good health. As the resistance to the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq slides into guerilla warfare, it is unclear whether this fight in and around Baghdad is being led mainly by the 'secular' loyalists of Mr. Hussein or is fast acquiring radical Islamist overtones.

■ 19 KILLED IN JERUSALEM ■ ABBAS CONDEMNINS ATTACK

Suicide blast rips apart Israel-Palestine ties

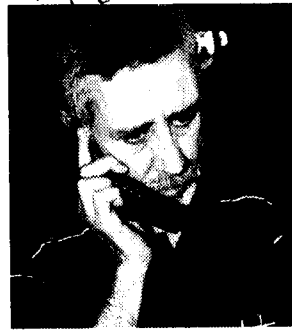
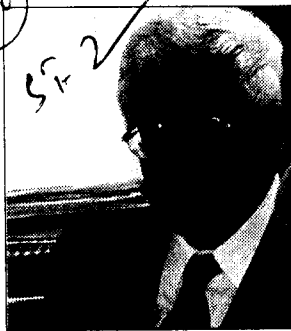
Press Trust of India

JERUSALEM, Aug. 20. — Israel today stopped hand-over of West Bank towns and severed contact with Palestinians after a suicide bus bombing here that killed at least 19 Israelis, including six children.

A Palestinian suicide bomber, dressed as a religious Jew detonated explosives in a packed bus passing through the religious neighbourhood of Mea Shearim in Jerusalem last night that also left over 100 injured.

Passengers on another bus in front of the main bus in which the explosion took place, and on a car behind it, were among the wounded, media reports said.

Police said the bomb had been packed with bits of metal for greater impact, adding "this was the biggest



NOT ON SPEAKING TERMS: Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Mahmud Abbas (left) and an Islamic Jihad leader, Md al-Hindi.

bus explosion in the past three years." The Palestinian militant groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad both claimed responsibility for the attack, a setback to the US-backed "roadmap" peace plan unveiled three months ago.

Israel froze all contacts with the Palestinian Authority and cancelled the planned handover of two West Bank towns — Jericho and Qalqilyah — to Palestinian

control. The Israeli Army also closed border crossings to seal off the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The foreign ministry said that Israel would reimpose a total military closure of West Banks, allowing no one in or out. Condemning the bombing, Palestinian Prime Minister Mr Mahmud Abbas today announced suspension of dialogue with hardline groups

Hamas and Islamic Jihad and vowed to take action against the militants.

"Palestinian Authority would stop all forms of dialogue with Hamas and the Islamic Jihad," daily 'Ha'aretz' quoted a senior Palestinian security official as saying. "Soon the Palestinian Authority will take security measures against Hamas and Islamic Jihad members."

The attack was "a terrible act against the Israeli civilians and this is not helping the interests of the Palestinian people," Mr Abbas said, adding that he has instructed security minister Md Dahlan to investigate the matter.

Meanwhile, Israeli industry and trade minister Mr Ehud Olmert warned that if the Palestinian Authority was unable to act against terror, Israeli-Palestinian ties would have to be reassessed.

THE STATESMAN

21 AUG 2003

Blasts kill 2, shatter West Asia peace

11.3 1318

Rosh Ha'ayin (Israel), Aug. 12 (Reuters): Palestinian suicide bombers struck in Israel and the West Bank today, killing two Israelis, shattering six weeks of relative calm ushered in by a ceasefire and raising questions over a shaky peace plan.

The explosions, at an Israeli supermarket and a West Bank bus stop, threatened to derail the two-month-old, US-brokered peace "road map", already in trouble amid recriminations between Palestinians and Israelis over non-compliance with its

terminian prisoners. The Palestinians' reformist leadership wants thousands freed to reduce the popularity of militants opposed to peace moves.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Palestinians had no hope of winning statehood from Israel as promised by the road map if they did not subdue militant groups.

"It will not be possible... to advance in the (peace) process — and ultimately the Palestinians

might not achieve what they want to achieve — because if the terror will not stop completely Israel will not be able to continue the process despite its fervent desire to do so," he said in a speech.

The first explosion tore through a supermarket in the central Israeli town of Rosh Ha'ayin. At least one person was killed as well as the suicide bomber. Six people were wounded.

W. A. 1318

1 3 AUG 2003

Riots break out in Basra

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

BASRA, Aug. 9. — Riots broke out in the southern port of Basra today after clashes between residents and British troops controlling Iraq's second largest city left at least four civilians wounded, witnesses said.

People hurled rocks and burned tyres all over the city's main streets as long-simmering tensions exploded in the blistering summer heat over the tortoise-like pace of the coalition force's reconstruction efforts.

The rioting started minutes after witnesses said a grenade was hurled at a British military truck near a gasoline station, where fed-up Iraqis waited in a long line for fuel, angered by the fact they were queuing up for hours in a country with the world's second largest oil reserves.

The British truck came under attack at 9:15 a.m. in front of a gas station where a man hurled a grenade and the vehicle was set on fire, Mr Ali Hussein, a taxi-driver who had been filling up his car at the time of the attack, said.

Four British armoured vehicles and three jeeps came to seal off the area, while a crowd lobbed rocks at them. The soldiers fired in the air to ward off the crowd and then started to shoot rubber bullets, wounding at least four Iraqis, including a child, witnesses said.

The crowd, with some women in headscarves firing off Kalashnikovs in the air, grew to more than 2,000 and shouted in anger over the gasoline shortage in the city,

10/8
11



Iraqi youths throw stones at a British soldier as clashes broke out in Basra on Saturday. — AFP

they added. The mob poured down the street toward the British forces' headquarters. No soldiers were seen on the street at one point.

Ex-Iraqi interior minister held: Former interior minister Mahmud Dhiyab al-Ahmad, one of 55 former Iraqi officials on the US most wanted list, has surrendered to coalition forces, the US military said today, a report from Baghdad says. "Mahmud Dhiyab al-Ahmad, number 29 on the coalition's list of most wanted government officials, is now under custody of coalition forces," the Central Command said.

Al-Qaida claim: A high-ranking Al-Qaida operative in custody has disclosed that Iraq supplied the

Islamist militant group with material to build chemical and biological weapons, the White House has said, another report adds from Crawford (Texas). "A senior Al-Qaida terrorist, now detained, who had been responsible for Al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan, reports that Al-Qaida was intent on obtaining (weapons of mass destruction) assistance from Iraq," the White House said in a report yesterday.

Britain for new UN resolution: Britain is in favour of a new UN resolution endorsing the reconstruction of Iraq, Ms Valerie Amos, British secretary of state for international development, said in an interview published today, a report from London adds.

Saddam an ambulance man!

BAGHDAD, Aug. 9. — Mr Saddam Hussein is alive and well in Baghdad and allowing his photograph to be taken with US troops. But unlike his namesake — the former Iraqi President ousted by US-led troops in early April — 31-year-old Saddam works as an ambulance man out of the capital's Al-Iskan hospital, where the dead and wounded from Thursday's car bombing at the Jordanian embassy were taken. "Contrary to what one might think, to be called Saddam during Saddam's rule was not good," he said. "I was even put in prison for four months in 1993 because I asked my friends to call me Ismael instead of Saddam." His father, Ali Hussein, said his son's name was chosen "by chance" before Saddam became President.

I hope they catch Saddam," he said of his namesake. — AFP

Iraq polls: UN special representative for Iraq Mr Sergio Vieira de Mello said here today that the world body was contributing to efforts to hold elections in 2004 in the war-battered country, a report adds from Cairo. "We will need to organise free, fair and truly democratic elections in the country sometime in 2004," he told a press meet after talks with Egyptian foreign minister Mr Ahmed Maher.

W. ASIA / RAID MAY MAR TRUCE

FD-101

W. Asia (10)

Hamas threatens to avenge killings

GAZA, AUG. 8. The armed wing of the militant Islamic group, Hamas, called on its fighters to make Israel pay a price for killing two of their comrades in a West Bank raid today that jolted a month-old ceasefire.

In separate comments, Ismail Abu Shanab, a Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, said the organization was re-evaluating its commitment to the three-month truce it declared along with other militant groups on June 29. "The crimes of the Zionist enemy committed against our people... will not pass without the enemy paying a proper price for these violations," Hamas's Izz el-Deen al-Qassam brigades said in a statement. "We call on our resistance cells to respond to these crimes and to teach the enemy a deterrent lesson."

Fayez Assader (26), identified by Qassam as its leader in the Nablus area, and Khamis Abu Salem (22), were killed in the raid in which an Israeli soldier was shot dead.

The army said it launched the operation in Askar refugee camp in Nablus to detain senior Hamas men planning attacks on Israelis. The gunbattle in Askar was not expected to derail the cease-fire declared by the main Palestinian groups June 29. The incident began before dawn on Friday, when soldiers surrounded a Hamas hideout to arrest two suspected Hamas bombmakers, said Col. Arie Knafo, who commanded the raid.

As the soldiers approached, they were shot at from inside the three-storey apartment building. An Israeli soldier was killed. Soldiers returned fire,

918
killing one of the Hamas activists. At one point, an explosion went off, bringing down most of the building and the second Hamas fugitive was buried under the rubble, the colonel said.

A third Palestinian, Mohammed Dak, 20 died later of gunshot wounds, a local hospital said. Witnesses said he was hit when soldiers shot at Palestinian stone-throwers during the raid.

Israeli troops later blew up the remainder of the building. The laboratory had contained dozens of kilograms of explosives, the colonel said. He denied initial reports that troops fired an anti-tank missile at the building, saying two tanks were on standby, but did not fire.

The battle came after a month of relative calm that followed the truce declaration. Though the cease-fire has dramatically reduced the level of violence that had reigned during nearly three years of violence, the Israeli military continues to send forces into West Bank towns and refugee camps nightly to arrest Palestinian terror suspects.

Also Friday, an Israeli Government source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Israel might alter the route of a series of fences, trenches, razor wire and a wall that is being built between Israel and the West Bank. Israel says the barrier is meant to keep suicide bombers and other attackers out of Israel, but the Palestinians are angered because parts of the winding fence plunge deep into the West Bank to include some Jewish settlements on the "Israeli" side of the barrier.

THE HINDO

9 AUG 2003

Israel sets free 330 Palestinians

Betunia (West Bank), August 6

ISRAEL RELEASED more than 330 Palestinian prisoners on Wednesday in what it called a gesture to bolster a US-backed peace plan. Palestinian officials dismissed the move as a sham.

The first prisoner freed flashed a V-for-victory sign at cheering relatives waiting at a checkpoint outside the West Bank town of Betunia and smiled broadly as he stepped off a bus that brought him from an Israeli jail.

Others kissed the ground, watched closely by armed Israeli soldiers, before boarding Palestinian vans for the trip home for tearful reunions with family and friends.

A Jewish settler carrying a protest banner broke through a security cordon and ran at the buses carrying the detainees to freedom but was wrestled to the ground by troops and taken

away. Right-wing Israelis and relatives of victims of Palestinian suicide bombings opposed the decision to begin freeing the Palestinians, though none of those released was directly involved in attacks.

Palestinians, who regard the prisoners as heroes of their nationalist cause, said the release did not go far enough and demanded amnesty for all 6,000 detainees in Israeli jails.

"It is worthless and meaningless," said Palestinian cabinet minister Yasser Abed Rabbo. "It is a theatrical step to appease Washington."

The dispute led Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas to pull out of talks set for Wednesday with his Israeli counterpart, Ariel Sharon, on a US-backed "roadmap" aimed at ending three years of violence and creating a Palestinian state by 2005.

Reuters

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 AUG 2003

Israel releases 300 prisoners

Jerusalem: Israel released more than 300 Palestinian prisoners on Wednesday, but Palestinians, complaining that this was not enough, cancelled a summit and called for US intervention to prevent a crisis in peace efforts.

Buses carrying prisoners slated for release began leaving Israeli prisons on Wednesday morning bound for West Bank and Gaza checkpoints where the Israeli government said the prisoners would be freed. Israel is holding about 7,700 prisoners, and Palestinians demand that Israel free thousands of them.

Israel, however, has ruled out freedom for Palestinians involved in terror attacks. But the disagreement goes deeper than that. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called the release a "deceit," referring to the fact that most prisoners to be freed had nearly completed their terms.

There was also some Israeli criticism. In an analysis headlined "A trawl through the prisons to net the smallest fry," 'Haaretz' reporter Amos Harel wrote that the list did not include any big names. On the other hand, families of victims of Palestinian terror attacks appealed to the Israeli supreme court to block the release. The court turned down the appeals.

The list includes 443 pris-



A Palestinian prisoner released from the Israeli Ktziot prison flashes a victory sign from a bus which left the prison near Nitsana village close to the Israeli-Egyptian border on Wednesday.

oners. Most were to be freed on Wednesday, but about 100, convicted of crimes, would be released later, officials said. Israel has noted that releasing prisoners is not part of the US-backed road map peace plan, but the issue has become an obstacle to implementing the blueprint. Almost daily, there are Palestinian demonstrations demanding freedom for prisoners, and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas has taken up the cause. Mr Abbas was to meet Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Wednesday, but called off the summit, mostly because of the prisoner dispute. AP

W. ASIA / FRAUD, SAYS ARAFAT

Israel names prisoners to be freed

HP 4
5/8

JERUSALEM, AUG. 4. Israel today published the names of hundreds of soon-to-be freed Palestinian prisoners as it ruled out the immediate withdrawal of its troops from more of the West Bank after a gun attack near Bethlehem.

The list published on the Israeli prison service's website includes 159 "administrative detenus," suspected militants who have not faced trial.

Another 183 have been convicted of anti-Israeli activity.

In addition, a prison service spokeswoman said a list of 100 Palestinians who have been jailed for illegal entry into the Jewish state or other criminal activity had been delivered to President, Moshe Katsav, for a pardon. Their names were not released.

The move follows a meeting of an Israeli ministerial commission on Sunday night which was set up to deal with the issue of prisoner releases.

The Palestinians have demanded the release all of the estimated 6,000 prisoners in

Israeli jails but the Government of Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, has been determined not to release anyone who it says has "blood on their hands."

The Palestinian Authority President, Yasser Arafat, denounced the impending releases as a 'fraud' while the head of a prisoners organisation described the list as an 'insult'.

"This is some kind of a trick. The Israelis want to deceive the world that they are doing something but we will refuse to look at this list as part of the implementation of the roadmap," Prisoners' Club chief, Issa Qaraqaa, said.

Ambush

Meanwhile, Palestinian gunmen ambushed an Israeli car near Jerusalem, wounding a mother and daughter and injuring two others, hours after Israel dismissed a Palestinian proposal for a permanent ceasefire. An Israeli Minister said his country would not make peace gestures until action was taken against the gunmen. — AFP, AP

THE FINDB

5 AUG 2003

RAMALLAH / ISRAEL FIRM ON STAND

49-14 L. Arafat (11)

Arafat, militants settle dispute

218

JERUSALEM, AUG. 3. The Palestinian Authority President, Yasser Arafat, and militants today temporarily settled a dispute that had threatened a ceasefire with Israel, Palestinian officials said on Sunday.

Under the deal, the 20 men from Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades wanted by Israel will remain for now in Mr. Arafat's headquarters in the Israeli-surrounded West Bank city of Ramallah, pending a possible future move to the town of Jericho.

Mr. Arafat had been sheltering the militants in the "muqata" compound but confined them to a single room on Saturday after Israel demanded they be sent to jail in Jericho as a precondition for an Israeli pullback from Ramallah that would ease his own confinement.

The Palestinian Security Affairs Minister, Mohammed Dahlan, said he and the Israeli Major-General Amos Gilad, failed in talks on Sunday to agree on further Israeli withdrawals from West Bank cities under a U.S.-backed peace plan. "The Israelis repeated their proposal to withdraw from Jericho and Qalqilya but we insisted on a pullout from major cities such as Ramallah," Mr. Dahlan said. There was no im-

mediate Israeli comment.

Israeli forces quit Bethlehem and the northern Gaza Strip after Israel, the Palestinians and the U.S. affirmed the peace "road map" at a summit in Aqaba, Jordan on June 4.

Al-Aqsa had said it would pull out of a three-month ceasefire that militant groups declared on June 29 if the Jericho transfer of the men in the muqata went ahead. Khaled Shawish, a Brigades member, said by telephone from the headquarters that the men, who are accused by Israel of attacking its citizens since the start of the *intifada* in September 2000, had suspended the hunger strike they declared after being detained.

But Mr. Shawish said the group remained opposed to moving to Jericho. "We are now waiting for Israel to withdraw from Ramallah so we can leave the muqata," he said.

Other members of the Brigades in Mr. Arafat's headquarters said they remained committed to the suspension of attacks on Israelis.

"We understand that we, the fugitives, are a burden on President Arafat, and we shouldn't have stayed here in the first place. But we reject the notion of being moved to a jail in Jericho". — Reuters

W. ASIA / ISRAEL TO HAND OVER RAMALLAH?

3/18 110-12 W. Asia (10)

Palestinian forces arrest 20 militants from Arafat HQ

RAMALLAH, AUG. 2. Security forces have arrested 20 suspected extremists today at the headquarters of Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, where they are believed to have hidden for over a year-and-a-half.

The men, mostly members of the Al-Aqsa Brigades, the military arm of Mr. Arafat's Fatah movement were taken to Jericho where they are being held, security sources said.

According to reports, the men were disarmed and arrested after they refused to voluntarily leave the headquarter compound. Israel has been calling for their extradition for over a year. There are hopes now that the Israeli army could hand over control of Ramallah to the Palestinian forces following the arrests.

Mr. Arafat himself has left his Ramallah compound for just brief periods over the past 18 months, out of concern that Israel would arrest him and send him into exile. Israel has repeatedly claimed that the Palestinian leader used his position of power to plan and coordinate terrorist attacks against Israelis.

Meanwhile, a senior Israeli official said in Jerusalem on Saturday that the Defence Ministry has ordered police and soldiers to remove six Jewish outposts in the West Bank and evict their residents as part of a peace plan pushed hard by the U.S.

The 'road map' peace plan agreed by Israel and the Palestinians two months ago requires Israel to take down scores of small outposts built without government authorisation since Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, took office in March 2001. So far, Israel has only taken down a handful of them, leading Palestinians to question Israel's commitment to the plan.

Israel must also freeze construction in about 150 larger official settlements established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since Israel captured those lands in the 1967 war.

The peace plan aims eventually to build a Palestinian state with "maximum territorial contiguity," something the Palestinians say is impossible with more than 200,000 Israeli settlers living in West Bank and Gaza. — DPA, AP

THE HINDU

. 3 AUG 2003

"You can't imagine how

10-14 3/8



The Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Yasser Arafat, speaks of the plight of his people in an exclusive interview to Vikram Sura for The Hindu.

He shares a portion of his meal with a stranger. From his thinly filled dining plate, he shares half a boiled, yolkless egg, one sprout of boiled broccoli, a small, juicy section of corn-on-the-cob and a sweetened shell biscuit. Perhaps it is his way of saying a guest is welcome. The host is Yasser Arafat, the harassed President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The venue is the Muqata. It is his blown-up home, his razed-down office, his cocoon in Ramallah, the temporary capital of the Palestinian nation. The occasion is a modest banquet hosted by him. Suppliants from all over the West Bank and Palestinian ambassadors to distant lands, around two dozen of them, are there. Some of his people hope that one-day Abu Ammar — his movement name — will hoist their flag over Al Quds or Jerusalem. While his people demand the eastern half of the city for themselves and their brethren in the umma, the western half of the city is for their cousins, the harassed Jews of Israel.

After the meal, Abu Ammar snucks his lips and rugs at his kaffiyeh the way a traditional Indian woman will tug at her sari-end to conceal a blush. There is a blush across his cheeks, some colour, more than last year when he looked deathly pale. But for Abu Ammar, the shape of his kaffiyeh is always supposed to remind you of Palestine. Press reports speak of the many hours he spends early morning shaping it.

It is the evening of July 29; earlier he personally saw off a British Minister who called on him in the Muqata. The Chairman appreciates the gesture. Recently, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said 'no' to his Israeli counterpart, Ariel Sharon, who suggested that he boycott the Chairman. As minutes tick by following the meal, the PLO chief line-edits in red communications in his name. Two aides adjust their chairs in a corner of the large rectangular table. The Chairman, at the head, dusts his military coat and stretches it. He signals he is now ready.

When I thank him for the meal, he nods, "We are friends." Chairman Arafat is a vastly experienced and formidable communicator. In conversation with a journalist, he knows when not to say more. When he is waiting for the next question, the eyes behind the glasses sway from person to person. His aide later tells me: "There is meaning behind every word he says." She perhaps forgets to add that there is meaning behind every word he does not say. For instance, he gently dismisses in two sentences the question of

tensions between him and Prime Minister Abu Mazen (the nom de guerre of Dr. Mahmoud Abbas). And two sentences are all he needs when asked whether Jordan and Egypt will send back their ambassadors to Israel. In the interview, Mr Arafat repeatedly refers to his role in history and in shaping regional and world events. An aide later tells me that he is an "honest mediator who works for solutions, not problems." A hard-line Israeli might retort, "that's nice fiction." However, it is clear that the grand old leader is taking the long view and seeking for his movement and his own leadership of it a new historical judgment.

It is close to two years since the hawkish Israeli regime imposed total restrictions on Mr. Arafat's freedom of movement. Speaking in both English and Arabic, he gave this 40-minute interview to Vikram Sura for The Hindu. Excerpts:

Vikram Sura: Are you hopeful that the new developments in the past several weeks you have achieved with your Prime Minister will eventually lead to a Palestinian state?

Yasser Arafat: Definitely. According to the road map, it has been mentioned clearly and obviously that in a year-and-a-half, we will have the ability for our independent Palestinian state. In the road map clearly and obviously — although the Israelis are insisting on not implementing it clearly and completely the road map. They are saying that they didn't until now accept the road map. They have put fourteen notes again in the road map. We have accepted the road map; although we have some remarks, we didn't mention this and it got our approval. Because we respect the peace of the brave that we have signed with our partner [Prime Minister Yitzhak] Rabin. The peace of the brave. I cannot forget that our partner Rabin paid with his life from this fanatic group in Israel. But we are, at the same time, following not only the Palestinian decision — it also became an Arab decision. You remember the initiative that was announced by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, which has been adopted by the Arab summit conference that took place in Beirut. And in the United Nations, 161 countries are for the state of Palestine.

Abu Ammar, had Iraq not been invaded, would the world community now be intensely engaged in resolving the conflict with Israel?

Definitely. Now they are involved completely with what is going on in Iraq. The understanding was that if the Arab states supported the invasion

of Iraq, the United States would be involved in resolving the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

This is the problem with the Israeli government and not with the peace. By way of example, there is the agreement of Wye River. It was with Sharon and Netanyahu and in spite of that they didn't implement it. The George Tenet understanding. It was with Sharon himself when he became Prime Minister. He didn't implement the George Tenet understanding. And the Mitchell report. It started in Sharm El Sheikh in the conference headed by President Mubarak, in the presence of President Clinton and King Abdullah. [Javier] Solana from the United Nations and Kofi Annan. And the report had been finished and offered through the Americans and through the Quartet Committee to both of us — to the Palestinian side and the Israeli side. We accepted it. Until now they haven't implemented it. These are facts, realities. I'm not giving you my own opinion. But they have to understand that Palestine is *terra sancta*, the holy land, not only for us but also approximately for the majority of the whole world. Besides, 161 countries in the United Nations have supported completely a united and independent Palestinian state. We are not asking for more. We are asking for what has been accepted internationally. What has been accepted even by my partner Rabin in the beginning and after that, with the Wye River, by Netanyahu and Sharon and the others.

Isn't it ironic that Prime Minister Abu Mazen has your blessings, yet Israel and the United States have issued a call to support him in order to isolate you?

I appointed him. You see, Sharon cannot forget his defeat in the siege of Beirut. What do I have to do? And he lost his title as one of the heroes of the Israeli army after his losses in the city of Beirut. And you remember after our departure from Beirut according to the American agreement, with Philip Habib representing the American administration, what happened? The massacre of Sabra and Shatila. You are seeing what we are dealing with here. These are not cantons, these are prisons! The majority of our infrastructure has been completely destroyed. All our farms — to give just one example, more than sixty per cent of the olive trees have been uprooted. How many thousands of families are making a living out of these olive trees! Our factories have been destroyed and they have used a one-tonne bomb. Not only that, they are still using depleted uranium [munitions]. And I can give you the American report, which has discovered the

same, in which they have mentioned that they discovered what the European mission from Holland has discovered also. (In July 2002, an Israeli Air Force F-16 dropped a one-tonne missile into a Gaza residential neighbourhood to kill Salah Shehadeh, the chief of the paramilitary wing of Hamas, accused of murdering Israelis. Around 15 Palestinians were killed in the explosion and many were injured.)

There have been some press reports that there was some kind of a tension between you and Abu Mazen.

No. There was this tension between him and some of our colleagues. But we have succeeded in solving it.

Could you explain why the Israeli attacks against Palestinians, and the other way about, have stopped after the Prime Minister took office and not with you?

Arafat: Until now they haven't stopped their attacks. Till now. Every day, every night, every month, they are attacking! Where? Even places they declared that they had withdrawn from. You can go and see [these places under attack], if you had the opportunity to see the Gaza Strip. It is a disaster. Beit Hanun [in the northern Gaza Strip]...

An aide: They occupied Beit Hanun even after the Prime Minister took office.

Arafat: After. And not only that. What is going on against our holy sacred places in Bethlehem and our holy sacred place in Jerusalem, Christian holy places and Muslim holy places and also in Hebron? Do you know that they have closed completely, and prevented our people from walking to pray in the mosque of Abraham? And what has been declared — actually we were working for it for six months ago. Not me alone. The Egyptians are working very hard with these fanatic groups — Hamas and Islamic Jihad — to accept the Hudna, the truce. And, at last, truly with these efforts, the Egyptians succeeded in getting it.

The Israeli government is non-committal on the separation wall and on settlements, not just outposts, while Hamas and Islamic Jihad are non-committal about their actions after three months of truce. Will the calm last and blossom into peace or is it deceptive?

We hope so [that it will last]. It will lead to peace if the Israelis will be committed to implementing accurately the road map. But the most important thing is that until now they are wasting time. Here we received the road map more than six months ago unofficially, officially more than

OKAYING THE FENCE

And killing hopes for Mideast peace

THE Mideast peace process is not going anywhere soon, and the "roadmap" may be as good as dead. President Bush should have known that he would be unable to pressurise Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to abandon construction of a security fence through the West Bank and avoided the embarrassment in having to eat his words only days old, to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas on the White House lawns that a fence meandering through the West Bank was an impediment to the peace process. This is a new low even for the American President. The fence is widely popular in Israel, commanding 80 per cent approval. It has concrete walls upto 25 feet high, ditches, barbed wire and high-tech sensors and goes deep into Palestinian territory, disrupts the economy and everyday life of thousands of Palestinians, and can be construed as a land grab designed to leave them holding very little territory should they get a state by 2005, as the roadmap envisages. Sharon has rejected Palestinian demands for an effective freeze on Jewish settlements, and there has been little progress on dismantling what even Tel Aviv calls "illegal outposts", meaning those it hasn't officially approved.

Mahmoud Abbas is left high and dry, he will be unable to convince fellow Palestinians that his confabulations with Bush have been worth while; it strengthens the hands of organizations like Hamas. Even as things stand Abbas is not a popular figure among Palestinians, with Arafat lurking in the shadows and may soon face a no confidence motion spelling the end of his premiership. Arafat, who still retains his following emerges as a martyr. American support for Abbas without showing him the respect that is his due is the kiss of death. Bush's failure to pressure Sharon hardens the perception among Arabs that Washington is not really a neutral mediator. Bush may have remembered how his father's refusal to pressure Israel lost him Jewish support in the 1992 Presidential elections. Even more significant is the evangelical Christian vote that Bush Jr counts on for the 2004 Presidential contest and which is militantly pro-Israeli.

It is a pity, however, that the Mideast peace process is going to be sacrificed to parochial political considerations in the US. This was entirely predictable. Indeed it is reasonable, be the benefit of hindsight, to suggest that the whole spurious road map was thought up to divert attention away from Bush's problems in Iraq.

Israel agrees to free 100 Islamic militants

Jerusalem: Israeli government approved a proposal by prime minister Ariel Sharon on Sunday to free 100 Islamic militants, a step intended to boost a US-backed peace plan and help the Palestinian premier, political sources said.

They said the cabinet approved the decision in a 14-9 vote shortly before Mr Sharon was due to leave for Washington, where he will discuss the peace roadmap with US President George W. Bush in the White House on Tuesday.

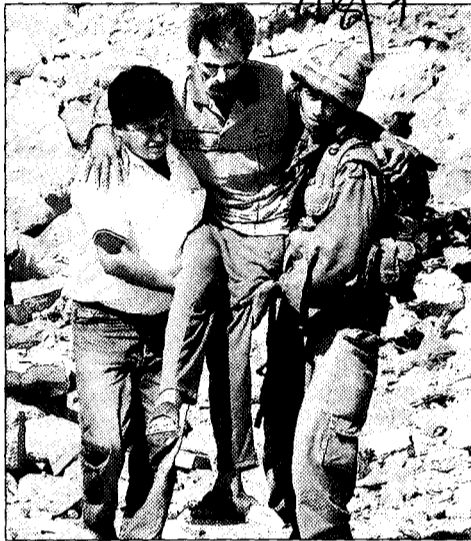
In another gesture intended to smooth the way for Mr Sharon's visit, troops removed a checkpoint near the West Bank city of Ramallah, opening the road to about 100 villages for the first time since a Palestinian uprising for independence began.

The 100 members of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups who will be released were not involved in attacks on Israelis. They will be added to a list of several hundred Palestinians slated for release this week.

Mr Sharon had until now balked at releasing any militants but wants to improve the standing of Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas, better known as Abu Mazen, under pressure from Islamic militants to secure the release of all jailed members of their groups.

Israeli political sources said a total of 600 to 650 prisoners might be released this week. "The main aim here is to strengthen Abu Mazen's standing," one source said.

Palestinian information minister Nabil Amr welcomed the cabinet decision but called for more prisoners to be released.



An Israeli soldier helps to carry a disabled Palestinian man through the check-point barrier at Ein Arik near the West Bank town of Ramallah on Sunday.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad said all 6,000 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel should be freed. "We reject this position and we do not consider it an initiative by the Israeli government. It is like someone is trying to throw dust in our eyes," said Mohammed al-Hindi, an Islamic Jihad leader in the Gaza Strip.

Mr Abbas met Mr Bush on Friday in his first visit to Washington since Mr Arafat appointed him prime minister in April under heavy US pressure.

Palestinian officials say Mr Abbas could face a confidence vote in parliament on his return from Washington but that he can fend off his critics if Israel implements the roadmap, which envisages the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005. Reuters

WEST ASIA / WEST BANK FENCE AN OBSTACLE: BUSH

Israel taking hesitant steps to peace: Abbas

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, JULY 25. The visiting Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, today told the President, George W. Bush, that while he was committed to the West Asia peace road map, there had been only "some progress" from Israel and that even some of the steps taken by the Jewish state had been "hesitant".

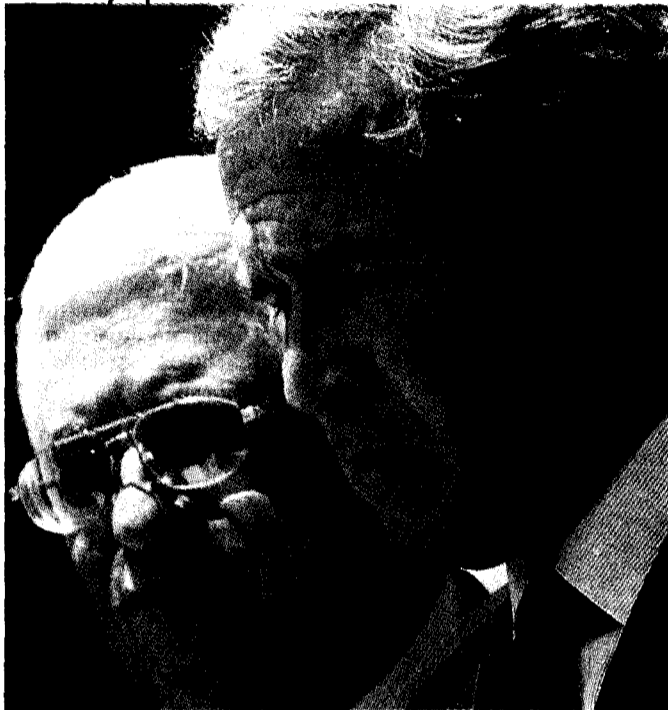
Mr. Bush acknowledged that the Israeli security fence was indeed a "problem" and this was an issue he had already raised with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon. The two are most likely to discuss the subject when Mr. Sharon comes to town early next week.

"It is very difficult to develop confidence between the Palestinians and Israel with a wall snaking through the West Bank," Mr. Bush said at a joint press availability at the White House Rose Garden with the Palestinian Prime Minister.

After thanking Mr. Bush for the \$20 millions in direct assistance to the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Abbas took up the issue of peace and the efforts made on his side. "... We remain committed to the road map and we are implementing our security and reform obligations... We have succeeded significantly where Israel, with its military might, has failed in reducing violence; and we will continue," Mr. Abbas said.

The Palestinian Prime Minister stressed that movement had to be made on a number of fronts, including the freeing of prisoners, lifting the siege on President Yasser Arafat, withdrawal from Palestinian areas and easing up on the free movement of Palestinians.

"A transformation in the human conditions on the ground



The U.S. President, George W. Bush, and the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, at a press conference in Washington on Friday. — AFP

must occur. As you have said many times, Mr. President, attacks on the dignity of the Palestinians must end," Mr. Abbas said and added that if settlement activity continued there may well develop a situation where the foundation of peace — a free Palestinian State where people can live in peace and security and side by side with Israel — is a "virtual impossibility". "Nothing less than a full settlement freeze will do because nothing less than a full settlement freeze will work... all settlement activities must be stopped now and the wall must come down."

The Bush-Abbas meeting was critical as Washington had shunned the Palestinian leader,

Yasser Arafat, for the last two years or more and made it very plain that he was not welcome as he had failed to deal with terrorism.

But the Bush administration has been reminded by Mr. Abbas and other senior Palestinian officials that a lot is expected of the United States over and above the Oval Office meeting. The Palestinian Prime Minister has said that Washington must ensure that Israel lives up to its commitments. And in the course of a day or so the visiting Palestinian leader has made it very plain that if the Jewish state proceeded with settlements that could unravel the ceasefire with Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

Kuwait steps towards democracy

Kuwait, July 13 (Reuters): Kuwait's emir issued a landmark decree today separating the post of Prime Minister from the crown prince for the first time since Kuwait's 1961 independence in an apparent concession to calls for greater democracy.

Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah appointed his brother, foreign minister Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, as the next Prime Minister, the first person other than a crown prince to occupy the job in the oil-rich, pro-western Gulf Arab state's history.

Both liberals and Islamists hailed the decision, which followed recent parliamentary elections, as an "essential first step" towards greater democracy.

"This is a step in the right direction and essential for reforms but it has to be followed by other important steps," former parliamentarian, Adnan Abdulsamad, said.

With the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq in April and a US call for reform in West Asia, Kuwait's ruling al-Sabah family has come under pressure at home and abroad to loosen its grip on government and share power.

Although the top post and other key government portfolios still remain in the ruling family, the new Prime Minister, as opposed to the crown prince, could be held accountable.

Under Kuwait's constitution, the emir and crown prince are above rebuke.

"This is a good, bold step because it allows for greater supervision of the government," Walid Tabbai, an Islamist MP, said. "But we still need more to be done. The cabinet, for example, has to be suitably selected. It has to be more democratic and reflect the wish of the people."

The new Prime Minister has until Wednesday to fill cabinet posts and seek a final approval from the emir. Members of the new government will then be sworn in before the new parliament, possibly

next Saturday.

The parliament, dominated by supporters of the ruling family, has no say on the choice of ministers but, by law, at least one member of parliament should be included in the government. The previous cabinet included four MPs.

"The decree is a good one because it broke

tradition. But we need more. People should take part in decision-making, allowed to take up important posts in the government. Now the ruling family has a monopoly," Abdullah al-Nibari, former MP and pro-democracy activists, said.

Members of the al-Sabah family held all the key posts in the previous administration — as ministers of defence, interior, oil, information and foreign affairs.



Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah, the new Prime Minister of Kuwait.

Israel threatens to arrest, deport Arafat

REUTERS

JERUSALEM/OSLO, JULY 13

ISRAEL could deport or arrest Palestinian President Yasser Arafat if he holds up his prime minister's efforts to implement a US-backed roadmap to West Asia peace, Israeli diplomatic sources said on Saturday. "Israel conveyed to Washington that if Arafat continues to undermine Abu Mazen, we will reconsider his location and status," a source said, using Palestinian PM Mahmoud Abbas's nom de guerre. "By status we mean immunity."

Abbas, a moderate and reformer, became PM earlier this year following pressure from the US, which has sidelined Arafat, accusing him of fomenting violence in a 33-month-old Palestinian uprising. He denies it. Palestinian officials say Arafat is trying to weaken Abbas, viewing him as too soft on Israel when it comes to implementing reciprocal measures required by the roadmap en route to Palestinian statehood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 2005. On June 29, Abbas coaxed a temporary truce out of militant groups spearheading the uprising. Israeli troops withdrew from the West Bank city of Bethlehem and areas of Gaza.

But tensions still simmer over 6,000 Palestinians in Israeli jails. Israel has said several hundred "minor offenders" could be freed — not enough to satisfy Palestinians who view the release of prisoners as key in any peace process. Abbas spoke with British PM Tony Blair on Saturday and asked him to pressure Israel to release prisoners, a se-



A Palestinian woman holds up a chain during a protest demanding the release of prisoners in Israeli jails in Bethlehem. Reuters

nior Palestinian official said. Israeli PM Ariel Sharon is to meet Blair in London on Monday and push for Arafat's deeper isolation.

Palestinian officials say Abbas's credibility is at stake over his failure to win concessions from Sharon. "Sharon is working on obstructing the road map," Arafat told reporters in the West Bank city of Ramallah, where he has been blockaded by Israel after waves of suicide bombings last year. Israeli officials have in the past said deporting, arresting or even killing ex-guerrilla leader Arafat were viable options.

The Palestinian Cabinet called on the international community to continue dealing with Arafat and said it would pursue prisoner releases. Though not part of the roadmap, the issue is likely to be

raised during Sharon's visit to Washington, which an Israeli official said was expected in the last week of July. Sharon was quoted on Sunday as accusing European countries of delaying peace in West Asia by siding too much with Arafat.

Sharon told the Norwegian daily *Aftenposten* that European nations should isolate Arafat. "Europe is maintaining contact with Arafat, meeting him, ringing him, and in this way is delaying a solution to the problems here in West Asia," he said. "I think there should be a joint effort to remove him from all posts," he added, accusing Arafat of trying to prevent Abbas from working for peace. Sharon did not single out European nations for criticism and said that he viewed Norway as a "friend and a supporter."

Liberals lose to Islamists in Kuwaiti poll

KUWAIT CITY, JULY 6. Islamists and supporters of the royal-led Cabinet kept their grip on Kuwait's Parliament in weekend elections while Westernised liberals suffered major losses, according to results released on Sunday.

Fundamentalist Muslims who call for the full implementation of Islamic law added one seat for a total of 21. Pro-Cabinet members jumped two to 14 of the House's 50 seats.

Liberals and their supporters — urging voting rights for women — won just three seats, down from 14 in the outgoing Parliament. The remaining 12 went to independents, an increase from four in the last House.

Under Kuwait's system, the Emir has the final say, with the ability to dissolve the legislature. Still, Parliament does have significant influence: It must approve all legislation and has in the past blocked the ruler's attempts to give women the vote.

There are no political parties in Kuwait, with many fearing



The former Parliament Speaker, Jassem al-Khorafi (second left) after his landslide victory in Kuwait on Sunday. — AFP

this would bring political strife. Candidates run as representatives of three fundamentalist and two liberal "movements," or as independents.

The Islamists fear Kuwait is losing its conservative identity, and want to change legislation to conform to Islamic law. The royal-led Cabinet follows varied policies, without a particular ideological line. And the inde-

pendents include many new faces with undeclared political affiliations who were elected based on local loyalties.

In the Government comment on the vote, Kuwait Television quoted the Deputy Prime Minister, Sheik Sabah Al Ahmed Al Sabah, as saying the Kuwaiti people had "proven political awareness and responsibility" in the elections. He said he was

"absolutely optimistic" that Parliament would have "more achievements to offer."

In campaign rallies, liberal candidates called for political reform and complained about a system in which only men over 21 can cast ballots. Accusations of vote-buying, and charges that many voters cast ballots according to allegiances to tribes and religious sects were rife.

Most liberal supporters traditionally come from Kuwait City and its suburbs. Outer tribal areas usually elect pro-Government or Islamist lawmakers.

Many liberals had hoped that success in Saturday's election would lead the legislature to agree to female suffrage in this small oil-rich state. That seemed less likely after their poor showing.

Candidates had also accused the outgoing house of failing to deal with major economic issues such as privatisation of an economy that depends on oil revenues and Government spending. — AP

THE HINDS

Roadmap, roadblocks

Will the Middle East truce hold?

With the Israeli withdrawal from Bethlehem and the Gaza strip and the declaration of a truce by the major Palestinian guerrilla groups Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, some small steps towards a lasting peace may have been taken, but they may not yet be the giant steps that everyone yearns for. It is unknown to what extent the truce will hold up if stray suicide bomb attacks occur; in any case, Tel Aviv thinks that militant Palestinian organisations will use this opportunity to regroup before launching fresh attacks. The Israelis and Palestinians, however, have held out some intriguing possibilities of late. The hawkish Ariel Sharon addressed Knesset recently to assert, uncharacteristically, that the Palestinians were under occupation which needed to be ended soon. On the other side Hamas is considering recognising Israel and coming on board for a two-state solution. Recognition by each side of the other's right to exist would go a long way towards easing tensions.

For the roadmap to proceed smoothly, some major difficulties need to be tackled. First, prime minister Mahmoud Abbas, who is negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians, is preferred by the Israelis and Americans but does not have much of a following among his own people. That could change, conceivably, if he administers properly the \$1 billion aid package Washington is proposing for the Palestinians. A bigger difficulty is Sharon himself, whose government is building a fortified fence separating Israeli and Palestinian areas, and incorporating many of the Jewish settlements built on Palestinian land in violation of the Oslo agreement. If this fence is completed, the Palestinians will not get a contiguous territory to call their own but will be divided up, instead, into many Bantustans. For the roadmap to work building this fence, obviously, has to stop forthwith. Which brings in the third unknown factor — the only one to stop a Sharon doing things his own way is America. However Bush's political adviser Karl Rove, past master of right-wing political manipulation, will most likely tell him that pressure on Sharon will lose Bush the Jewish as well as evangelical Christian vote in the 2004 presidential elections. The biggest roadblock to the peace process could well be Bush deciding to pander to this militantly pro-Israeli segment. That would mean destruction of secular Palestinian nationalism, pushing the region into embracing Islamic fundamentalism, and defeating American strategic objectives in the Middle East. For a Huntingtonian "clash of civilizations" not to come about, Bush needs to act with sagacity.

THE STATESMAN

: 7 JUL 2003

Israel agrees to release jailed Palestinians

Jerusalem: The Israeli cabinet approved in principle on Sunday the release of Palestinian prisoners in a bid to bolster a US-backed peace plan and a truce declared by militants, senior government officials said.



Ariel Sharon

There was no immediate word on how many prisoners would go free or the terms for their release. Israeli officials have insisted that Palestinians involved in lethal attacks stay locked up. Palestinians demand the release of all prisoners, estimated at between 5,900 and 8,000.

The government officials said the cabinet voted 13-8 in favour of a prisoner release and the establishment of a ministerial committee to decide who would go free and when. A major prisoner release would boost the popularity of reformist Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, who has been accused by militants of trying to snuff out their uprising without guarantees Israeli occupation will end.

The cabinet session was to be followed by talks on the prisoner issue between Israeli defence minister Shaul Mofaz and Palestinian security affairs minister Mohammed Dahlan. Palestinian officials and militants demand that Israel release all prisoners, estimated at between 5,900 and 8,000, in order to preserve a three-month truce declared a week ago.

"We will request the release

of all prisoners. It is impossible to end the conflict even if one prisoner remains behind bars," Palestinian minister of prisoner affairs Hisham Abdel-Raziq told Reuters before the Israeli cabinet convened.

Gideon Ezra, one of the most right-wing ministers in Israel's cabinet, said in a radio interview that for Mr Abbas's sake, the Israeli government must "make concessions on this issue, as long as it does not cause damage to Israel."

A senior Palestinian official said the next withdrawals should be from the West Bank cities of Ramallah and Hebron. Israeli officials said this would not happen quickly. "These moves will not occur for several weeks, depending on Palestinian performance in the meantime," one official said.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government has demanded that Mr Abbas begin dismantling militant factions before it broadens withdrawals. Troops quit the West Bank city of Bethlehem and the Gaza Strip early this week.

Mr Abbas met S.A. Yassin, founder of the Muslim militant movement Hamas, on Saturday for the first time since taking office three months ago. They discussed prisoner releases but issued no comments to reporters. Mr Abbas told Reuters in an interview last week he was seeking the release of thousands of prisoners held by Israel.

Palestinian sources said Mr Abbas and Mr Sharon would meet again on Wednesday. At talks last Tuesday, both leaders affirmed their commitment to the peace plan endorsed at a June 4 summit they attended with US President George W. Bush in Aqaba, Jordan. Reuters

U.S. raid: angry Turkey closes border with Iraq

ISTANBUL, JULY 5. Turkey today closed its border with Iraq after U.S. forces in Iraq detained 11 of its soldiers on suspicions of fomenting an attack on a Kurdish Governor in the north of the country, the NTV news channel reported.

The Habur border post, the sole checkpoint between Turkey and Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, was shut early today, NTV said. "This is the first reaction to the detention of the Turkish soldiers in north Iraq," the news channel commented on its website.

The Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reacted furiously to the U.S. raid on Turkish troops, and was reported saying: "This is a repugnant incident that should never have happened."

"We cannot accept this," Mr. Erdogan protested, according to Anatolia news agency, condemning the United States for "behaviour unworthy of two allied countries in a coalition".

The Turkish leader told Anatolia he had demanded the immediate release of the men.

Mr. Erdogan said the Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gul, had discussed the arrests with the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, who had assured him that the soldiers were safe and that he would do what he could to have them freed.

Three officers and eight non-commissioned officers were arrested yesterday in Sulaymaniyah, fiefdom of the Iraqi Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani, of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the *Hurriyet* newspaper reported.

About 100 U.S. soldiers stormed the local offices of the Turkish special forces after cutting the telephone lines. The 11 soldiers and six employees were taken to the nearby city of Kirkuk, the daily said. — AFP

6 JUL 2003

ONE HINDO

Israelis kill militant, anger Palestinians

Qalqilya (West Bank), July 3 (Reuters): Israeli troops shot dead a militant and temporarily blocked Palestinian traffic on Gaza's main road today, angering Palestinians who assailed the actions as a threat to US peacemaking.

The killing in the West Bank — and the road closure only

three days after the long-blocked highway was reopened — followed attacks by Palestinian militants, Israel said.

Palestinian lawmaker Saeb Erekat called for more US intervention before the peace plan — known as the road map — collapses, saying: "Israel until now has not declared a full cessation

of violence as stated in the road map."

Hours earlier, President George W. Bush praised Israel's pullback from Bethlehem, the Palestinian West Bank town revered by Christians as the birthplace of Jesus, and Spain and Italy offered to host a peace conference called for by the plan.

In Gaza today, an Israeli bulldozer placed cement barriers on the north-south highway to block Palestinian traffic for almost six hours. On Monday, Israel raised peace hopes by clearing the way to Palestinians for the first time in two-and-a-half years.

An Israeli military source said the highway closure followed the firing of an anti-tank missile that wounded three Israelis at the Kfar Darom Jewish settlement in Gaza overnight.

In the West Bank, Palestinian security sources said Israeli soldiers killed a member of the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades linked to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction in the town of Qalqilya.

The Israeli army said its troops shot dead an armed Palestinian during an arrest raid.

Israel withdrew from most of the Gaza Strip this week and the leading Palestinian militant groups declared a ceasefire.

Israeli forces pull out of Bethlehem

W Amr
11-9
3/7

Bethlehem (West Bank): Israeli patrols pulled out of the West Bank city of Bethlehem on Wednesday, clearing the way for Palestinians to resume security control in a deal both sides hope will advance a U.S.-backed roadmap to peace.

Military jeeps and armoured personnel carriers streamed out of Bethlehem in the final hours before the handover, expected to be in effect by late afternoon. Under the deal, Palestinian police will curb militants and prevent attacks on Israelis.

Though relieved at the end to Israeli incursions and curfews, many Bethlehem residents remained sceptical, mindful of the military checkpoints that will stay on encircling the city. "It is a ceremonial withdrawal, not a real one," Bethlehem mayor Hanna Nasser said of the deal sealed at a meeting on Tuesday between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas in Jerusalem.

Committing themselves to end almost three years of conflict, the leaders agreed to set up four committees to work on implementing the road map, which sees a Palestinian state by 2005 in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip alongside a secure Israel.

"We can do this together and the conditions now are promising to make further progress," a Palestinian official quoted Mr Abbas as telling Mr Sharon. Palestinian information minister Nabil Amr said Mr Sharon and Mr Abbas would meet again next Tuesday.

"There is a new reality today," Israeli foreign minister



Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (left) greets his Israeli counterpart Ariel Sharon prior to their talks in Jerusalem on Tuesday.

Silvan Shalom told Israel Radio on Wednesday. "In my opinion they (Palestinians) want to change direction."

The Bethlehem handover follows an Israeli troop pull-back from much of Gaza that restored free movement for Palestinians for the first time since after they rose up for independence in September 2000.

The Israeli army said its forces in Gaza came under fire twice, but sustained no casualties—a relative calm. By noon, a spokesman for the Palestinian security forces said they had fully deployed through the densely populated coastal strip.

The road map requires Palestinian police to fill security vacuums wherever Israeli troops and tanks pull out, and Palestinian commanders promised to prevent attacks against Israel from Bethlehem, an Israeli securi-

ty source said. Revered by Christians as the site of Jesus's birth, Bethlehem saw intensive fighting as Israel reoccupied it last year following waves of suicide bombings. The handover deal is an early achievement for US mediators pushing the roadmap.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said US President George W. Bush welcomed the statements made by Mr Abbas and Mr Sharon. "The president is pleased that the process is continuing with the Prime Ministers working as hard as they are and as diligently as they are in the spirit that they are," said Mr Fleischer.

On Wednesday, US officials were to announce a \$30 million aid package for the Palestinians to help restore public services in the West Bank and Gaza, a US official said. Reuters

3 JUL 2003

WEST ASIA / ARAFAT FREE TO VISIT GAZA: SHARON

Israel hands over control of Bethlehem to PA

49-4
377

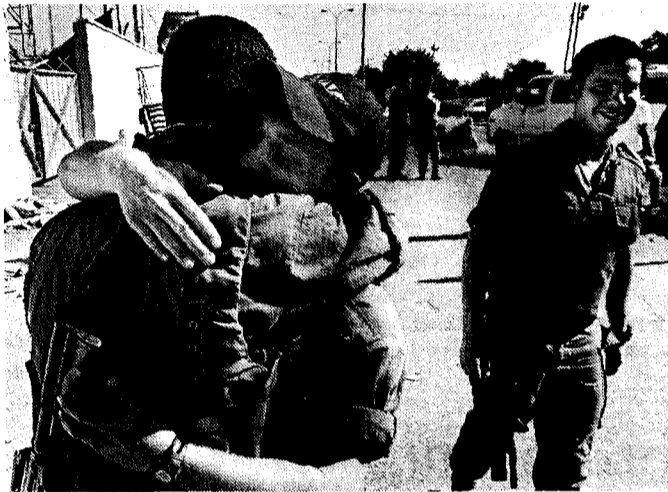
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BETHLEHEM (WEST BANK), JULY 2. Sirens blaring, Palestinian police moved through the West Bank town of Bethlehem on Wednesday, the second area turned over to the Palestinian Authority (PA) by Israel under a U.S.-backed West Asia peace plan.

Clapping and cheering, residents leaned from their windows to watch about 60 police personnel in dark blue uniforms march through town, followed by a single motorbike and two cars. Police said they were forced to walk because they did not have enough vehicles to transport all of them.

"Welcome, welcome," a grandmother, Hilal Murra told them. "It's better to see them in the streets than the Israelis."

Army transport trucks started carrying away armoured vehicles and containers full of equipment from two Israeli bases on Tuesday, withdrawing to the outskirts of Bethlehem. They officially turned over security to Palestinians shortly after midday, a military statement said. Senior commanders met on Tuesday and finalised details of the handover. In a statement, the military said Israel would be in charge of security of Israelis, including settlers in nearby villages. Palestinian security forces, meanwhile, "have committed to preventing and



Israeli soldiers hug each other as they prepare to leave Bethlehem after Palestinian forces took over security for the city on Wednesday. — Reuters

thwarting terrorist attacks in the areas under their responsibility." A similar formula held in the Gaza Strip, where Israeli troops pulled out late on Sunday.

Speaking in front of the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon's office before their Tuesday summit, the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, said the turnover of Gaza and Bethlehem would be "followed by pullbacks from the rest of the cities and towns and Palestinian refugee camps." It was the first time the two leaders spoke be-

fore reporters and cameras at a Jerusalem summit, their third in six weeks.

Mr. Abbas asked for freedom of movement for the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, who has been confined to his West Bank headquarters by Israel for more than a year. Mr. Sharon said he would allow Mr. Arafat to move to Gaza. The Israeli Defence Minister, Shaul Mofaz, told the Cabinet on Wednesday that Israel wants to see Palestinians start disarming militants in Gaza and Bethlehem before pulling out. — AP, PTI

3 JUL 2003

3 JUL 2003

THE FINISH

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TRUCE AT LAST

THE TRUCE DECLARED by Palestinian militant groups might prove fragile but its longevity will not depend on their actions alone. Israel caused the collapse of similar initiatives launched in the past by resort to state terrorism, which was justified in accord with its self-serving, and very expansive, definition of its security requirements. Among these measures were the many attempts at assassinating terror suspects, which, on many occasions, led to the death of innocent Palestinians even when the intended victim managed to escape. The use of helicopter-launched missiles on targets located within heavily populated areas, in the full knowledge that widespread destruction would be caused, has been a particularly reprehensible aspect of the policy of using indiscriminate force. Israel has consistently rejected advice from those who have argued that it would only enhance the security of its citizens if it completely withdrew from the occupied territories. Israel has begun withdrawing troops from the northern Gaza Strip in response to the truce declaration, but has indicated that it would proceed with its departure from the rest of the Palestinian territories only at the pace it decided on. Neither has Israel given any indication that it will shed its penchant for insisting on conditions that the Palestinian side cannot meet. Israel can no longer rely on security-related excuses to justify its incursions into Palestinian towns and villages or the restrictions it imposes on the movements of the residents, since the militant groups have suspended their campaign. In commencing its troop withdrawal as soon as the truce was declared, Israel has implicitly dropped its demand that the Palestinian Authority must simultaneously dismantle the terrorist organisations. This can be taken as a sign that Israel can be made to see reason. The quar-

rel, composed of the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, which drew up the road map for West Asian peace must press Israel to end all policies and actions that provoke retaliatory violence.

The truce by itself does not signify that Hamas and the Islamic Jihad have discarded their belief that they must retain a capacity to use force against Israel, which they regard as an illegitimate entity. Their decision to suspend the violent campaign has been shaped by tactical considerations. The Palestinian Authority worked hard to pressure and persuade the militants to agree to the truce. Its success in this endeavour offers hope that it will be able to keep these dissident organisations in line in the future as well. That the armed wing of Fatah, owing allegiance to the Palestinian Authority President, has also joined the truce negates the propaganda that Yasser Arafat might undermine the efforts at peace. While the militant groups continue to insist that Israel should release all those arrested in the course of the *intifada*, they no longer seem to treat this demand as a condition that must be fulfilled if the truce is to endure.

The truce and the troop withdrawal are the first steps on the road map. The package of measures, which seeks to facilitate movement towards a comprehensive peace in West Asia, has much in-built fragility including a fundamental tilt in Israel's favour. But it constitutes the only set of proposals to deal with the conflict available at the moment. Those who have drawn up the road map, and repeatedly express their belief in its value, must ensure that Israel lives up to its commitments. The application of pressure on the Palestinians alone will not lead to any forward movement. It can aggravate the rage, which in turn begets violence.

WE FIND

2 JUL 2003

WEST ASIA / ARAFAT FACTION YET TO DECLARE TRUCE

U.S. invites Abbas for talks

JERICHO (WEST BANK), JUNE 29. The United States President, George W. Bush's National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, has invited the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmud Abbas, to visit Washington, a senior Palestinian official said on Sunday.

Ms Rice asked Mr. Abbas to come to Washington "in the coming weeks" to meet Mr. Bush, said the official, who asked to remain anonymous. The invitation was made during a meeting in Jericho between Ms Rice and Mr. Abbas on Saturday.

Mr. Bush had announced during a June 4 summit in Aqaba, Jordan, that he would invite Mr. Abbas to Washington. The summit had launched the road map, a U.S.-backed peace plan that calls on the Palestinians to curb terror attacks and requires that Israel freeze all Jewish settlement activity and dismantle illegal outposts as the first steps leading to the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005.

Ms Rice arrived on Saturday on a trip to press the White House's efforts to pull the two sides back from the brink, after more than 60 people were killed earlier this month in a wave of tit-for-tat violence.

During the meeting with Mr. Abbas, the Palestinian side called for a freeze on Israeli settlements and the release by Israel of Palestinians prisoners, including Marwan Barghouti, West Bank chief of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement who has



The U.S. National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice, and the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, discuss a point in Jericho on Saturday. — AFP

been held since 2002, the Palestinian official said.

Meanwhile, the militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups announced on Sunday that they are suspending attacks against Israel for three months.

Infighting

The timing of the announcement came as a surprise, after Palestinian officials said the declaration would be delayed at least until Monday because of political infighting in Fatah movement, a partner in the three-way deal.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad did not want to wait for Fatah to re-

solve its internal disagreements. In response to the announcement by the militants, Fatah officials said they were still not ready to join the declaration.

Abdel Aziz Rantisi, a Hamas leader, read the truce announcement in a phone call to the Associated Press. "The two movements (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) decided to suspend military operations against the Zionist enemy for three months, starting today," Mr. Rantisi said.

The Islamic Jihad leader, Mohammed al-Hindi, also confirmed that the truce took effect on Sunday. — AFP, AP

30 JUN 2003

THE HINDO

Hamás, Jihad accept truce

JERUSALEM, JUNE 28. An Islamic Jihad leader said on Saturday the group has accepted a conditional three-month halt to attacks on Israelis — the first on-the-record confirmation of the deal from a militant leader.

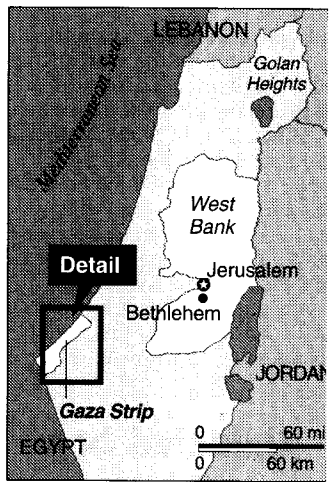
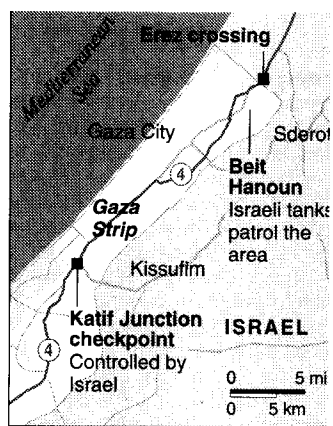
Meanwhile, the U.S. National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice, arrived in Israel on Saturday and was headed to meet the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, in the West Bank desert oasis of Jericho. Ms Rice will also meet Israelis as part of her mission to move both sides toward their next moves under a new peace plan.

The militants' cease-fire has given a major push to the U.S.-sponsored peace initiative, which got off to a rocky start because of continuing violence. The "road map" plan for Palestinian statehood by 2005, launched by the U.S. President, George W. Bush, on June 4, is the latest effort to end the generations-old conflict.

Intensive meetings continued on Saturday between Islamic Jihad, the larger Hamas group and Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction to work out the final wording of an official cease-fire declaration.

"We have accepted a conditional cease-fire for three months," said Islamic Jihad's Gaza leader, Mohammed al-Hindi, in the first public confirmation by militants that they had accepted the deal.

The Syrian-based leaders of the two Islamic groups had agreed to the truce earlier in the week. A formal announcement was expected on Sunday, after the main parties bring 10 smaller factions on board and to add



SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI A

final touches to the document. At least one Palestinian faction, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, appeared to be holding out as a Palestinian negotiator tried to persuade the group's jailed leader to accept the deal, a Palestinian official said on condition of anonymity. Expectations were that the group would sign

on. A statement issued in the name of another militia, the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, said the group also had not yet committed itself to the cease-fire, apparently because there was no Israeli guarantee on the release of Palestinian prisoners. The statement, from some of the militia's local West Bank leaders, however, did not necessarily represent the views of the whole group.

Hamas leaders have indicated that they've agreed to the truce, but they were waiting to declare formal acceptance in the joint declaration with all the parties.

Pull out

In another sign that the peace effort was moving forward, Israel agreed on Friday to pull troops out of parts of Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Bethlehem. The "road map" peace plan requires Israeli forces to pull back to positions held before the outbreak of fighting in September 2000.

Friday's initial agreement on an Israeli troop withdrawal from Gaza and the West Bank town of Bethlehem came with a pledge by Israel to halt targeted killings of Palestinian militants, sources said. That is one of the Palestinian militants' key demands for going ahead with a cease-fire. At its weekly Saturday meeting, Mr. Arafat's Fatah movement approved the agreement with the Israelis on a troop pullback. Ms Rice's mission, which includes a meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, coincides with the formal announcement by militant groups on Sunday that they are ending attacks. — AP

29 JUN 2003

THE HINDU

Support grows for Palestinian truce

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JUNE 26. In agreeing to a conditional three-month ceasefire against Israel, the Palestinians appear to have seized the initiative in the diplomacy surrounding the enforcement of the peace "road map" set in motion earlier this month.

The Palestinians are expected to formally announce the ceasefire decision covering the Palestinian territories and Israel, during the weekend visit to the area by the U.S. National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice. The Palestinians are likely to follow up their decision to hold fire by accepting responsibility to take over the security of Gaza Strip and possibly, Bethlehem.

The Palestinian Authority had so far been hesitating to take up this charge, because the extremist Palestinian group, Hamas, was not on board. But now with Hamas, despite its internal differences, agreeing to the ceasefire, the Palestinian Authority has a reasonable chance of ensuring that suicide bombers do not attack Israelis.

The Hamas had so far spearheaded suicide attacks, though the Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, associated with the mainstream Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), had also



The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, with the Irish Foreign Minister, Brian Cowen (right), at the former's headquarters in Ramallah on Thursday. — AFP

been involved in terror attacks.

While there are powerful internal forces within the Palestinian groups that still oppose the ceasefire, there is a reasonable chance that it might hold. Media reports suggest that the key spiritual leader of the Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who is enormously influential, is backing the ceasefire move. Mr. Yassin had apparently declared his intent to support the ceasefire to the Egyptian intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, whom he

met at his residence earlier this month. Khaled Mashal, a senior Hamas leader, who is based in Damascus, is another influential backer of the initiative. Marwan Barghouti, whose popularity, opinion polls show is only second to that of the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, has also been instrumental in bringing about the ceasefire decision.

The Palestinian decision has apparently pushed the Israelis to the backfoot. Israel had made

it clear that the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, and his security chief, Mohammad Dahlan, should confront and disarm the Hamas. But by forging a ceasefire, the Palestinian leaders have averted the prospects of Palestinians fighting among themselves.

The chances of a Palestinian civil war igniting can, therefore, be virtually ruled out. The fighting capability of the Hamas has also remained preserved.

This obviously does not suit the Israelis, who have been demanding that the Hamas must be disarmed and its "terror infrastructure" dismantled.

In fact, the suspicion in Israel is that reeling under a spate of Israeli attacks, the Hamas is looking at the ceasefire as an opportunity to re-group.

Not surprisingly, top Israeli intelligence and military officials have been travelling to the U.S., to persuade Washington to pressurise the Palestinian Authority to disarm Hamas.

A top Israeli intelligence official who was in the U.S. recently, sought to demonstrate to the establishment in Washington that the Palestinian security forces run by Mr. Dahlan and other members of the Palestinian leadership have the capacity to disarm Hamas.

27 JUN 2003

WEST ASIA / ABBAS EFFORTS TO SAVE 'ROAD MAP' PAY OFF

WNY HAM HAMAS, Islamic Jihad agree to truce

JERUSALEM, JUNE 25. A Palestinian source said on Wednesday that top leaders of the militant Hamas and Islamic Jihad groups have agreed to halt attacks against Israelis for three months.

The claim could not be confirmed with Palestinian or Israeli officials. But Israeli military intelligence officials have said they expect such an agreement, and Palestinian officials and militant leaders have suggested it is imminent.

The Palestinian source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the document outlining the truce terms was signed in Damascus by the top Hamas leader, Khaled Mashal, and the Islamic Jihad leader, Ramadan Shalah, and came as a result of contacts between them and Marwan Barghouti, a leader of the Palestinian uprising jailed in Israel.

Mr. Barghouti signed the agreement on behalf of Fatah, which is headed by the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, and the Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, the source said.

The military wings of all three groups have carried out bombing and shooting attacks against

Israelis during 33 months of fighting, killing hundreds.

In the document, the militant groups agree to a moratorium on attacks for three months.

In exchange, they demand Israel end targeted killings of militants and military incursions into Palestinian areas, the source said. They also call for a release of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel — but do not set any deadline or time-frame for this, the source said.

Local Hamas leaders could not confirm the agreement. But Mohammed al-Hindi, the top Islamic Jihad leader in the Gaza Strip, confirmed Hamas agreed to a three-month truce and was trying to arrange a joint declaration with his group.

Mediators were currently in the process of informing Palestinian and Egyptian officials of the agreement.

Egypt has played a major role in helping Mr. Abbas persuade the militants to end attacks and give a chance to the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan.

The source said an official announcement on a cease-fire would probably be made in coming days, possibly from Cairo. — AP



Blindfolded and handcuffed, Khawla Kawasme (left), being taken into custody by an Israeli soldier in Hebron on Tuesday. Ms. Kawasme is a relative of Abdullah Kawasme, a Hamas leader killed by Israeli troops last week. — AP

Truce-wary Israel continues raids

HT-15
25/6

Jerusalem, June 24

ISRAEL HAS warned it might not accept a truce offer from Hamas, saying it considers such a ceasefire just a ploy by the guerrillas to buy time and regroup for more violence.

Tel Aviv continued its crackdown on the militant outfit on Tuesday, with Israeli forces sweeping through Hebron and arresting more than 130 Palestinians in a roundup targeting the West Bank city's Hamas network.

The arrests came just days after Israeli troops shot and killed Abdullah Kawasme, the militant group's leader in Hebron. Israel blames him for the deaths of 52 Israelis.

Palestinian residents said troops rounded up people with any Hamas links, including relatives of the outfit's members. Elsewhere in the West Bank, troops arrested 30 other suspected militants, the army said.



AFP

Palestinian policemen jump from a vehicle with guns in Bethlehem on Tuesday.

The sweep comes as Hamas and other militant groups are on the verge of agreeing to halt attacks on Israelis, Palestinian officials say.

A US-backed peace plan, the "roadmap" to Palestinian statehood by 2005, has been hung up over the two sides' inability to end 33 months of fighting, with each saying that the other must go first.

An agreement by Palestinian militias to suspend their armed uprising could be a major breakthrough. However, Israeli officials remained deeply suspicious, saying a truce is just a ploy by militants to win time to prepare for more shootings and bombings.

An agreement by Palestinian militias to suspend their armed uprising could be a major breakthrough and a way out. However, Israeli officials remained suspicious, saying a truce is just a ploy by militants to win time to prepare for more shootings and bombings.

However, Israeli officials said a Hamas-Abbas understanding might not be acceptable to them, noting that under the peace plan, the Palestinian Authority must disarm militias, not court them. At best, Israel would accept an internal Palestinian arrangement as a brief precursor to a crackdown, officials said.

AP

25 JUN 2003

Israel sets Abbas 3-week deadline to rein in rebels

Jerusalem, June 21

ISRAEL PRESSED the Palestinians on Saturday to rein in Islamic militants opposed to peace talks but vowed to continue its controversial track-and-kill operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Following Friday's shuttle diplomacy by secretary of state Colin Powell to save an internationally backed roadmap to West Asia peace, Israel agreed to give the Palestinians three weeks to organise forces for a crackdown on militants, a source in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's office said. During this period, Israeli forces in the territories would largely stand down, the source said, but added "there would be no immunity for 'ticking bombs'" — militants Israel says are about to attack and kills in targeted missions.

Palestinian officials did not immediately comment on the offer. But the Palestinian Authority has long demanded Israel end its "assassinations", which it says bolster militants.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas fears a crackdown on militants could spark a civil war and would prefer to pursue a truce. But after meeting Powell on Friday, Abbas said ceasefire talks with militant

groups led by Hamas would come to nought unless Israel halted incursions and blockades.

Israel, emboldened by Powell's denunciation of Hamas as an "enemy of peace", has rejected Abbas's conciliatory approach.

"A truce is in itself a ticking bomb, so it cannot last in the long run," Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom told Israel Radio. "There cannot be a situation where the Palestinian extremists decide when this ticking bomb becomes a live and real bomb."

Militant groups have yet to decide on an Abbas-led truce.

"I think the dialogue (with these groups) is over..We are waiting for the results, for (their) response," Palestinian Information Minister Nabil Amr said on Saturday.

More than 60 people have been killed on both sides since the roadmap's launch at a June 4 summit, imperilling the most ambitious US peace initiative since Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza rose up for independence in September 2000.

Militant factions oppose the plan's call for an end to violence and reciprocal-confidence building steps leading to a Palestinian state in the two territories by 2005. Hamas and other groups want to destroy Israel itself.

Reuters

WEST ASIA / 'ABBAS MUST DO MORE TO CHECK MILITANTS'

Powell warns Hamas against violence

JERUSALEM, JUNE 20. Calling Hamas an "enemy of peace," the United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, said on Friday that the Palestinian Authority must strip the group of its terror network and that negotiating a truce — as the Palestinian Prime Minister has been doing — is not sufficient.

As Gen. Powell spoke at a news conference with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, an Israeli driver was killed and three passengers were wounded in a Hamas shooting attack in the West Bank. Since a West Asia peace summit two weeks ago, 27 Israelis and 40 Palestinians have been killed. Four of the Palestinians were killed while carrying out attacks on Israelis.

Gen. Powell said the violence was all the more reason to implement a U.S.-backed peace plan, which was launched at the summit. "The pace and urgency of our work needs to be maintained in order to capitalise quickly and decisively on this moment that history has given to us," Gen. Powell said after meetings with Mr. Sharon and the Israeli Foreign Minister, Silvan Shalom.

Gen. Powell singled out Hamas as an "enemy of peace." The Islamic militant group has killed hundreds of Israelis in recent years and has been trying to scuttle peace efforts, including the latest plan, the



The Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon (left), with the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, at the end of a joint press conference in Jerusalem on Friday. — AP

so-called "road map" to Palestinian statehood by 2005. "We must make sure that all international pressure possible is brought

to bear on these organisations, so that they know they will not succeed, they will not prevail, they will be dealt with," Gen. Powell said, referring to the Palestinian militias, including Hamas. Abdel Aziz Rantisi, a Hamas leader, responded angrily to Gen. Powell's comments, calling him a "big liar."

"This is a statement that reflects and proves that he is a little slave to the Zionists and to his master Sharon, that he is the real enemy of peace and justice in the world," he said.

Gen. Powell met later the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, who has been trying to negotiate the terms of a cease-fire with Hamas. Mr. Abbas has said he will not launch a crackdown for fear of triggering a civil war.

After meeting with Gen. Powell, Mr. Abbas demanded that Israel take steps to ease restrictions on Palestinians, stop settlement building and "change itself from an enemy into a partner."

"The logic of confrontation cannot match the logic of peace," Mr. Abbas said.

Gen. Powell said he and Mr. Abbas spoke mainly about security arrangements.

Gen. Powell said he again stressed that Palestinian attacks must end. "Violence and terror is not the way to build a state," he said. — AP

21 JUN 2003

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Israel: clashes during evacuation

JERUSALEM, JUNE 19. A day before the arrival of the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell, Israel today began evacuating the first inhabited Jewish settlement outpost in the West Bank as part of the "road map" peace plan, despite fierce resistance from settlers.

Mitzpeh Yitzhar, near Nablus, is the first populated outpost the army has dismantled since the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, began uprooting them on June 9, as part of the international "road map" peace plan. Ten uninhabited outposts were removed last week.

Settlers clashed with soldiers and ignited Palestinian-owned wheat fields and olive groves in the outpost in an attempt to disrupt the operation, army radio said.

Four police officers and three settlers suffered minor injuries in the clashes. The army placed a closure on all settlements near the outpost and erected roadblocks to prevent additional settlers from joining the fray. Some of the settlers, who lay on the roads to prevent army move-



Settlers clash with Israeli soldiers and try to prevent them from reaching Mitzpeh Yitzhar on Thursday. — AP

ment towards the settlement, were arrested. — UNI

Suicide blast

AP reports:

A suicide bomber blew himself up in an Israeli grocery store early Thursday, killing one man, despite an intense push by Palestinian and international leaders to persuade militant groups to end such attacks.

The Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, met on Thursday the DFLP and PFLP, to bring about a change in the situation.

20 JUN 2003

THE HINDU

King's allies win in Jordan polls, Islamists return to Parliament

AMMAN, JUNE 18. Allies of King Abdullah II have won more than half of the seats in Jordan's parliamentary elections, final results confirmed on Wednesday. Muslim fundamentalists returned to the legislature as the largest Opposition bloc.

The victory by allies of King Abdullah II had been expected as Jordan's political culture heavily favours the tribal leaders who owe allegiance to the Hashemite dynasty.

The leading Opposition party, the Islamic Action Front, won 18 of Parliament's 110 seats, according to final results posted on the Interior Ministry's web site and read over the state television.

Its representation is likely to be boosted by six Front sympathizers or former members who won seats as independents.

The Front spokesman, Hamza Mansour, has accused the

Government of fraud, saying electoral officers 'colluded' with certain candidates.

But the Information Minister, Mohammad Affash Adwan, said the allegation was "baseless because the election process was conducted objectively and impartially."

Tribal leaders loyal to the King won 40 seats. Other pro-government politicians, including former legislators and ex-Cabinet ministers, took 22 seats.

Supporters of victorious candidates fired bullets in the air in street celebrations that began in the pre-dawn hours of Wednesday.

Prominent among Front winners was Hayat al-Museimi, the top scoring female candidates in the elections.

The law reserves six seats for women. They are awarded to the women who score the six highest returns anywhere. Fifty-

four women ran in the polls.

"I'm a representative of the nation, not only women, and my parliamentary agenda is national issues that focus on freedom, economic development, social justice and, foremost, the implementation of Islamic Sharia (law)," Ms. al-Museimi said in a telephone interview.

The Front, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement, seeks to introduce strict Islamic law, such as veils for women and a ban on alcohol, and the abrogation of Jordan's 1994 peace treaty with Israel.

It regards U.S. policy in West Asia as biased toward Israel and bent on controlling Arab oil wealth.

While the Front and its allies will command only 22 per cent of the incoming legislature, this will allow a measure of opposition to the Government's moderate policies. — AP

The tragedy of Palestine

By Achin Vanaik

40-10
18/6

WHEN ATHENS took over the island of Melos to extend its security, the Melians protested: how could Athens, the fountainhead of democracy, do this? The Athenian reply was classic: for themselves there was the Law of Democracy but for the Melians there was the Law of Empire! This is exactly how the rulers of the U.S. are behaving today but with one key difference — they insist that the Law of Empire is also the Law of Democracy. There are three ways to respond to this. One can attack and expose this pretence as part of the fight against their empire-building. One can endorse and justify this claim. One can remain silent so as not to offend the “masters of the universe”. The Indian Government, most of the ‘foreign policy establishment’, and much of the elite will adopt the second or third position.

This should not occasion surprise, for there is another Law of Empire. Empires can never be sustained without other Governments and other people of some power and prominence outside the ‘heartland’ being willing to collude/collaborate with, rationalise/apologise for, the behaviour of imperialists. Before the modern era, this was justified for “reasons of state”. Now, it is most usually justified in the name of “national interest”. This, in turn, is decided not by any assessment or expression of a properly informed national popular will but simply by key Government personnel surrounded by a small belt of decision-shapers. The next step is the public transmission and endorsement of such decisions via another belt of opinion-makers and shapers. Elite and sectional interests are thus repeatedly disguised as national interests. If in democracies there is at least some scope for debate and struggle so that broader and more popular concerns are sometimes heard (and less frequently addressed), it is also the case that the disguise is all the more effective.

On a few occasions, the ‘national interest’ is self-evident because behind its pursuit stands a transparent national popular will, not elitist presumptions. National liberation movements struggling against colonialism, foreign occupation, dictatorship, or apartheid are the clearest

examples of this. Today, the most powerful national liberation movement anywhere in the world is that of the Palestinians. Yet, their struggle stands triply betrayed. It is being betrayed by the supreme ‘peacemaker’, the U.S. It is being betrayed by the Arab and the Third World Governments. The former, being undemocratic, are terrified of the political dynamic that would be unleashed in the region if a popularly backed independent Palestine actually emerged. The latter (including India), in con-

the first Gulf War made the U.S. more powerful than ever in the region, it pushed through the 1993 Oslo Accords to bring about what Israel most wants — effective military, territorial, economic and political control over the West Bank and Gaza but without having to take responsibility for the well-being of its people. Of course, Israel violated even these accords by expanding its illegal settlements. But Oslo collapsed because the Palestinian people rejected the fraud, signalled by the rise of the second

The moral integrity of the Palestinian cause is simultaneously its biggest asset and the greatest weak spot of Israel and the U.S.

trast to their attitude towards the Western-supported apartheid regime of South Africa when they promoted its moral-diplomatic isolation, would now simply like the Palestinian issue to fade away. For this to happen, it is important that some “final settlement” takes place, not that it embodies elementary principles of justice, making it unacceptable to Israel. Finally, it is the great tragedy of the Palestinian cause that few other liberation movements have had to suffer so inept and disastrous an internal political leadership!

Today’s U.S.-sponsored ‘road map’ is simply a repackaging of the old Oslo process, itself meant to culminate in the creation of a Bantustanised Palestine permanently subordinated to Israel. But because the U.S. President, George W. Bush, has, for the first time, formally declared support to the principle of a separate Palestinian state, he is being applauded for statesmanship and vision. Outside pro-Zionist circles it is extraordinary why this should be so. For more than 50 years, the three constants of U.S. foreign policy in West Asia have been a) maintaining Israeli dominance; b) controlling oil; c) preventing Arab unity. Its periodic diplomatic moves have never been guided by principles of democracy or justice but by how best to cash in on any favourable shifts in the general relationship of forces.

In 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Iraq in

intifada in September 2000, initially provoked by the arrogance of Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon at the Al Aqsa Mosque. Despite doing everything to keep the Oslo process going, even Yasser Arafat had to finally baulk at the demands made by Tel Aviv and Washington, else his credibility among Palestinians would have been totally destroyed.

Today, how ironic that Israel and the U.S., the only two foreign occupying forces in West Asia and guilty of inflicting unspeakable brutalities on the people of the region, are being hailed as genuine peacemakers! Amazingly, the U.S. has also been applauded for imposing an unelected leader of its choice on the Palestinians (since Mr. Arafat can no longer be relied upon) and for then pursuing another fraudulent “peace process” through him! Israel’s settlements are now divided into two categories — the overwhelming majority are unassailable “facts on the ground” that any final settlement must accept, and a few unofficial ones, which Israel should dismantle. So there is no question any more of the complete withdrawal of Israel from all of the occupied territories. Palestinians must legitimise further large-scale robbery of even the occupied territories.

Of course, Israel is adamant (and fully backed by the U.S.) that the new Palestinian state, if it comes into being, can only have “certain attributes of sovereignty”, not full sovereignty.

This means no separate armed forces since this would mortally threaten Israel. There will be no Israeli compensation for its robbery of land and properties or for the ethnic cleansing of 70 per cent of Palestinians in 1948 because there can never be any apology (this is what the issue of “right of return” for refugees is at bottom all about) for the injustice done by Israel then, or after 1967 when it initiated and maintained, through the most brutal violence, the longest running illegal military occupation in modern history. If the Palestinians refuse to accept such terms of surrender, they themselves will be to blame for the continued Israeli occupation, which the U.S. will support barring the odd criticism here and there.

But the chances of this fraudulent U.S.-backed plan succeeding are low. Given Palestinian weakness, Mr. Sharon sees the concessions as too much. But he cannot openly oppose the U.S., which wants some settlement to stabilise its regional dominance. So his strategy is to play for time till the U.S. elections come along next year when domestic pre-occupations become paramount and no presidential aspirant can afford being seen as tough on Israel. As for the Palestinians, rejecting the leadership of Abu Mazen is not enough. To succeed in their goal of eventually achieving a just and dignified settlement they must have a new political leadership that will, no matter how difficult, eschew violent retaliation against Israel’s brutal colonial rule and seek to shift the political relationship of forces against Washington and Tel Aviv by learning how to appeal to the U.S. and world public opinion, in the way that Nelson Mandela was able to do for the ANC. The moral integrity of the Palestinian cause is simultaneously its biggest asset and the greatest weak spot of Israel and the U.S. Maximising Palestinian unity is thus vital and that means developing a post-Arafat democratic leadership that also represents the over four million Palestinians outside the occupied territories and whose voices are today not at all heard. In the absence of such an emergent leadership, the most likely short-run development will be yet another defiant, courageous, yet desperate third *Intifada*.

WEST ASIA / ANOTHER PUSH FOR PEACE

Abbas to meet militia leaders

GAZA CITY, JUNE 17. The Palestinian Prime Minister, who is making a final push to halt attacks on Israelis, met on Tuesday a U.S. envoy dispatched to the region to supervise implementation of a troubled peace plan.

The head of the U.S. monitoring team, John Wolf, held talks with Mahmoud Abbas ahead of the Prime Minister's meeting with Palestinian militias later in the day.

On Monday, Egyptian mediators went home without a firm agreement from Hamas and other armed groups to lay down arms, but Palestinian officials said they were confident a deal could be reached in the coming days.

The Palestinian legislator, Hanan Ashrawi, said the talks were going well. "Maybe, after 24 hours, there will be positive results," she said after meeting Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the Arab League, in Cairo on Tuesday.

The militants have said they are willing, in principle, to halt attacks, but have attached conditions: Israel must halt targeted killings of Palestinians suspected of involvement in violence and other military strike, release prisoners and withdraw to positions held before the outbreak of fighting in September 2000.

However, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, told Par-

liament on Monday that he would continue his offensive against Hamas. Israel also says a ceasefire, or so-called "hudna," can only be a step toward dismantling the armed groups.

Mr. Abbas has said he would not use force against the militias for fear of triggering civil war.

The United States has not taken sides publicly in this dispute. Israel has sent the head of Israel's Shin Bet security service, Avi Dichter, to Washington to brief the National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice, and other officials on the Government's position regarding Hamas and a hudna. In another

development, the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, called the wife of the imprisoned West Bank leader, Marwan Barghouti, early Tuesday, and told her Israel would release Mr. Barghouti in the next two days.

The Israeli Attorney-General wrote to Mr. Sharon that it would be 'inconceivable' to release Mr. Barghouti whom he described as a "first-rate architect of terrorism," before the trial has ended.

A source close to the talks said U.S. mediators would press Israel to end the targeted killings, and that if it succeeded, the militant groups would then agree to a truce. — AP



TRYING HIS HAND: The U.S. envoy, John Wolf (left), meets the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, to pursue peace, in Gaza City on Tuesday. — AP

Apathy marks Jordan polls

AMMAN (JORDAN), JUNE 17. Jordanians generally took a leisurely attitude to voting on Tuesday in the Parliamentary elections that tribal allies of the King are expected to win.

Electoral officers here reported a low turnout in the first hours of voting, reflecting widespread voter apathy and a holiday. "I'm not too keen to vote because lawmakers have done little for us, but I had to come because my candidate is a family member," said Reba Najjar (34), after she voted with six sisters and her mother. She had arrived at an Amman polling station in a bus provided by a candidate, a common practice in Jordan.

The elections are the first under King Abdullah II, a ruler of absolute power who can veto legislative bills, dismiss Parliament and rule by decree. Parliament has not met since the King dissolved it two years after ascending the throne in 1999. He repeatedly postponed elections as popular sympathies were gripped by Israeli-Palestinian violence on



A voter casts her ballot in Amman on Tuesday. — Reuters

the neighbouring West Bank. The Jordan's Parliament, unlike many Arab rubber-stamp legislatures, has some power. It can block bills and force a Prime Minister and Cabinet to resign. "Some people are selling their votes for money and I don't blame them because they have no food on their table," said Fatima Nasr, (55), a mother of five, in Zarqa, 25 km northeast of

Amman. Voters are disillusioned by Parliament's inability to improve the economy, said a poll expert, Moussa Shekhani. Unemployment is 14.4 per cent and about 22 per cent of the population is at or below the poverty level.

A total of 765 candidates, including 54 women, are vying to win a place in the 110-seat Chamber of Deputies. The upper Chamber, the Senate, comprises 40 members appointed by the King. Nearly 300 leaders of the country's major tribes are contesting. Most are likely to win the support of their constituents. Tribesmen owe allegiance to Hashemite dynasty.

Only four of Jordan's 31 political parties are fielding candidates. Many are inexperienced — parties were prohibited until 1989 — and many believe they have little chance of making headway against entrenched patterns of voting along tribal and family lines. . — AP

E.U. asks Iran to accept tougher inspections

By Batuk Gathani

BRUSSELS, JUNE 16. The Foreign Ministers of European Union, meeting in Luxembourg, today took the initiative to co-ordinate their response with that of the U.S., in the background of the growing "student protests" in Iran.

The U.S. administration is preparing to put a "nuclear squeeze" on Iran. The U.S. and its European allies want the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the United Nations' watchdog, to press Teheran for tougher inspection of that country's nuclear facilities.

Unlike the U.S. President, George W. Bush, European Government leaders have not overtly praised the Iranian students who are agitating for more transparency, better governance and recognition of human rights.

The Iranian authorities have charged student and other activists with inciting anti-Government protests.

It is in this background that the U.S. and its European allies will, later this week, urge the IAEA to warn Iran to curb its alleged nuclear activities.

The Foreign Ministers deliberated on the issue to work out a suitable response to the challenge posed by Iran's nuclear activities. At a board meeting of the IAEA today, the U.S. stopped short of demanding that Iran be declared as being in breach of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The IAEA meeting coincided with a call to Iran by the Foreign Ministers to "urgently and unconditionally" accept tougher inspections. A European Union official was quoted as saying on Monday: "The Iranians cannot be surprised by our stance. They know we have always linked progress on the trade side with a political dialogue that entails becoming transparent over issues such as weapons of mass destruction."

Iran has argued that its nuclear projects are strictly for civilian use. It has also stated that the Government would agree to tighter inspections only if the ban on access to nuclear technology is lifted. According to European media reports, Iran's failure to report imported natural uranium has raised concerns.

There are "strategic and geopolitical" concerns about Iran's growing nuclear capability. The situation is compounded by the student protests spreading to other cities from Teheran.

Iran's Islamic establishment has condemned the Bush administration's support for the protests, stating that it amounts to interference in the country's internal affairs.

THE HINDU

17 JUN 2003

Israel, Palestine resume talks

PTI & AFP

JERUSALEM, June 15. — Israel and the Palestinians have resumed high-level security talks after a week which saw some of the worst bloodshed in the 32 months of Palestinian uprising.

Following the high-level security talks between the two sides yesterday night, which went on for three hours at a venue in the West Bank town of Ramallah, the Israeli defence establishment is preparing to withdraw from the northern Gaza Strip, Army Radio reported today. Israel would also handover security control to the Palestinians following talks.

In Kennebunkport (Maine) today Mr George W Bush said he has not lost hope for peace in West Asia but insisted the world must deal harshly with terrorists.

Pre-emptive attacks on Hamas and other hardline Palestinian groups behind anti-Israeli violence are Israel's only option until the Palestinian Authority can quell the violence, Israel's ambassador to the USA,

Jihadi rocket power

GAZA CITY, June 15. — The hardline Islamic Jihad movement said today it had fired a new type of missile from the Gaza Strip towards a southern Israeli town, in a statement.

It said that at 11 a.m. GMT its armed wing, the Al-Quds Brigades, "succeeded in striking the Sderot settlement with a new Quds 2-type missile." Israeli police said that today morning a Qassam rocket, produced by Islamic Jihad's larger rival Hamas, had hit Sderot's cemetery, but caused no casualty. — AFP

Mr Daniel Ayalon, said today.

Reports from Gaza city say Hamas today condemned the latest Israeli-Palestinian security contacts, but hinted it would end its boycott of Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmud Abbas' government and resume factional talks. "This security meeting is hurting Palestinian interests and only consolidating security for the occupation," Hamas leader Mr Abdul Aziz al-Rantissi said.

Palestinian and Israeli security offi-

cial met yesterday night and reportedly struck a deal for an army withdrawal from re-occupied areas in the Gaza Strip in return of a guarantee that Palestinians would prevent militants from launching rocket attacks.

The move, in line with the US-backed peace roadmap, which demands an Israeli withdrawal to pre-intifada lines, comes after one of the bloodiest weeks in the conflict and amidst international efforts to bring Hamas and Israel back from the brink of an all-out war. Mr John Wolf, the head of the US team tasked with monitoring the roadmap, arrived in Israel today, while a senior Egyptian intelligence officer, Mr Genera Mustapha Buheeri, also arrived in the Gaza Strip for talks with Palestinian factions aimed at reaching a cease-fire.

New Jewish settlement: A Jerusalem report adds that five new Jewish settlement outposts have been set up in the West Bank and the demolition of three outposts under a US-backed peace plan has been delayed, the Peace Now movement and settlers said today.

West Asia security talks resume

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESS

GAZA CITY, June 14. — Palestinian and Israeli security officials began talks near Jerusalem late tonight to discuss a partial withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories, a senior Palestinian official said.

"The meeting has started," the official said without wanting to be named. Among those attending the talks were Palestinian minister of state for security affairs Md Dahlan, coordinator for Israeli activities in the Palestinian territories Gen. Amos Gilad and officials of Israel's Shin

Beth Intelligence service.

At the talks, Mr Dahlan would demand a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Bethlehem in exchange for taking over the security responsibilities for those areas, the source said. "Dahlan will ask Israel to completely withdraw from Gaza and Bethlehem back to the 28 September 2000 borders," he said, referring to their positions before the outbreak of the Palestinian *intifada*.

The first contingent of US monitors who'll supervise implementation of the peace "road map" were headed to the region today.

Hamas no to ceasefire

GAZA CITY, June 14. — Hamas today rejected the possibility of a ceasefire with Israel after one of the bloodiest weeks in their 32-month-old conflict. "Hamas is rejecting any call for ceasefire under occupation," senior Hamas leader Abdul Aziz al-Rantissi said. "The word ceasefire is not in our dictionary... This is a situation of self-defence." — AFP

FRIDAY, JUNE 13, 2003

BLOWS TO PEACE

M. Aziz
11/10
13/6

WAGING PEACE HAS become hazardous and demanding, like perhaps at no other period in recent memory. Hardly a week after the handshake for peace in the deserts of Jordan in the presence of the American President, the Middle East has plunged back into the familiar abyss of hatred and unmitigated violence. The enveloping darkness makes a cruel mockery of the road map for peace drawn up by the quartet of the U.S., the European Union, the United Nations and Russia and on which George W. Bush had staked his prestige. It lies shattered, littered with the bodies of innocent Israeli and Palestinian victims. With the extremists on both sides still clinging to their irrational faith in the gun, there was always the danger that violence would erupt and deny the peace initiative the breather from killings on which it hoped to sustain itself. A century of enmity was not about to end, the hardliners in Israel and the Palestinian terrorists were not easily to be won over. The challenge from them was not unexpected, but what has jolted the world is that violence should break out before the idea of peace had even begun to sink in.

The world had apparently reckoned without the likes of the trigger-happy Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon. The most shocking feature of the violence of the last three days has been the way the state of Israel and its hawkish Prime Minister have responded to the evolving situation on the ground. Not surprisingly, the first shot was fired by the Palestinian terror groups, which attacked an Israeli military outpost on Sunday and killed four soldiers. If he had been loyal to his peace pledge, Mr. Sharon should have held fire and denied the terrorists the reward they were hoping for. By retaliating on an unprecedented scale, the Prime Minister betrayed the trust reposed in him by the international community and undermined the fragile process to which he was a party. The

assassination attempt on Abdul Aziz Rantisi, co-founder and one of the high profile policy-makers of the Palestinian group, Hamas, guaranteed the result that all opponents of peace were fighting for: an escalation of violence that is shocking even by the horrific standards of the Middle East. The suicide attack on a passenger bus in Jerusalem on Wednesday, for which a Hezbollah group in Lebanon has claimed responsibility, occurred despite the heightened security in Israel, if anything underlining the urgency of restraint by the state. Mr. Sharon's response was to launch another retaliatory strike. There was no evidence of the change of heart proclaimed by Israelis when Mr. Sharon described illegal Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory as occupation.

Washington has stepped in and condemned the Israeli assassination attempt on Dr. Rantisi. It should move quickly to ensure that the mindless violence by both sides does not derail the peace commitment, the main support for which stemmed from the powerful backing of Mr. Bush. The Jerusalem suicide attack has been criticised by the Palestine President, Yasser Arafat. For his aide and Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, the killings are a severe test of his capacity to rein in the militants. Mr. Abbas, who faces opposition from important quarters within the Palestinian camp itself, needs the support of the U.S. and cooperation of Israel to succeed. Mr. Bush, scheduled to send a monitoring team to the region, should press Mr. Sharon and his hawkish military to halt their strikes before he urges Mr. Abbas to clamp down on Palestinian terrorists. After undermining the authority of Mr. Arafat with Washington's tacit support, Israel should realise that it is in its interest to strengthen the hands of Mr. Abbas and not attempt to instigate a civil war in Palestine, which will only drag the entire region further into the abyss.

BE HINDO

13 JUN 2003

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WEST ASIA / A NEW STAGE IN THE CONFLICT

Israel, Hamas vow to fight each other to the finish

W. Asian (W)

GAZA CITY, JUNE 12. In the third Israeli air strike in 24 hours, Israeli helicopters fired several missiles at the car of a Hamas fugitive on Thursday, killing seven people, including the wanted man, his wife and 2-year-old daughter.

The latest spike in violence — 35 Israelis and Palestinians killed in two days — suggested a new stage in the 32-month-old conflict, with Israel and Hamas threatening to fight each other to the finish.

Hamas said it would unleash multiple attacks and urged foreigners to leave Israel for their own safety. The Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, said that despite a new U.S.-backed peace plan, he would hunt Palestinian militants "to the bitter end."

In a 24-hour period that began on Wednesday afternoon, a Hamas suicide bomber killed 16 people in a Jerusalem bus attack and Israel carried out three air strikes that killed 18 Palestinians, about half of them civilians.

In the latest rocket attack on Thursday, Israeli helicopter gunships fired missiles at a car belonging to Yasser Taha, a Hamas fugitive and member of the group's military wing. In all, seven people were killed, including Taha, his wife Fatima (25), and their 2-year-old daughter, Asnan, doctors said.

A baby bottle and baby shoes were pulled from the burning car.

The car was targeted in Gaza City's Sheik Radwan neighbourhood, near a cemetery, where earlier in the day the 11 dead from Wednesday's air strikes were buried. Witnesses said at least one missile hit as bystanders surrounded Taha's car.



Relatives and friends mourn Yafa Mualem, killed in a Wednesday Palestinian suicide attack, during her funeral in Jerusalem on Thursday. — Reuters

The intensity of Israel's strikes against Hamas in recent days suggested a new stage in the conflict. It comes at a time when expectations are fading that the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, will be able to rein in militants.

Mr. Abbas has said he will not force a showdown, and will instead try to persuade Hamas and other armed groups to halt at-

tacks on Israelis. In a Cabinet meeting on Thursday, Mr. Sharon ridiculed Palestinian leaders as "crybabies" for saying they can't dismantle militias by force. Israel said it would not stand by until Mr. Abbas — described by Mr. Sharon Thursday as a "chick that hasn't grown its feathers yet" — is able to persuade the armed groups to halt attacks. — AP

Arafat will have to be expelled: Israel

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JUNE 11. In tandem with the attempt to assassinate a senior Hamas leader on Tuesday, the Israeli Defence Minister has said that the top Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, may be expelled out of the Palestinian territories soon.

Addressing the foreign affairs and defence committee of Parliament, the Minister, Shaul Mofaz, said on Tuesday that "at this moment, it won't be right to do so (expel Mr. Arafat), but its is very much possible that in the very near future, there will be no choice but to do so."

A week after the Aqaba summit, where the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was formally revived in the presence of the U.S. President, George Bush, the Israeli Government appears to have taken some key decisions. First, instead of waiting for the moderate Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, to negotiate with the extremist Hamas, a possible deal that would restrain violence against its citizens, Israel has decided that it would deal with this organisation directly and at its own terms.

Consequently, the attempt to assassinate the Hamas leader, Abdel Aziz Rantisi, is seen here as part of an effort to weaken this group through the use of force. The consequences of this decision are far-reaching. By taking on the Hamas directly, the Israelis are likely to marginalise Mr. Abbas. Such a move is also expected to torpedo security reforms envisaged by the Palestinian security chief, Mohammad Abbas, aimed at disarming the Palestinian groups and their subsequent rehabilitation as a border security force.

The Egyptian Intelligence Chief, Omar Suleiman, who has been deeply involved in the reformation of the Palestinian security forces arrived in Palestinian West Bank headquarters in Ramallah on Wednesday. But with anti-Israeli sentiments after yesterday's assassination attempt running extremely high, it is highly unlikely that Mr. Suleiman will, right now, be in any position to give the Aqaba process a positive push.

Second, the Israeli government by threatening Mr. Arafat with expulsion may be signalling that it has, besides Hamas, also made up mind to undermine the Palestinian mainstream organisations such as Fatah, the Fatah Tanzeem and the Al Aqsa martyrs brigade.

Overwhelming control

Mr. Arafat is known to be exercising overwhelming control over these set-ups, which form the core of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Consequently, his expulsion from the Pal-



The Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat (left), greets the Egyptian intelligence chief, Omar Suleiman, in Ramallah on Wednesday. — AFP

estian territories can render these groups rudderless and weakened. Mr. Mofaz has already prepared the grounds for Mr. Arafat's exit during his address to the Israeli Parliament. He pointed out that Mr. Arafat was making every effort to derail the Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement and the reforms that Mr. Abbas was seeking to enforce. Fresh attacks against Israelis, including suicide bombings were being planned after the Aqaba summit, and most of them were being masterminded by organisations affiliated to the Fatah. Diplomatic sources pointed out that Israelis may not be walking out of the peace process, but, instead, are trying to manoeuvre themselves to a position of strength by deliberately attempting to weaken their arch-foes — the Hamas and the powerful Palestinian head, Yasser Arafat. Mr. Mofaz indicated this in his address when he said that the peace process was likely to take years to take root and would be marked by several ups and downs. !

Peacekeepers were warned of blast

Threats were coming daily, so it was hard to distinguish between real and false alarms: Afghan officials

MIKE COLLETT-WHITE
KABUL, JUNE 8

PEACEKEEPERS in Afghanistan said on Sunday they had received a warning before a suicide car bomber blew up a bus full of German troops in Kabul, killing four soldiers and wounding 31 in the biggest attack on the force to date.

Police said one Afghan civilian was killed in the bombing, which came as the troops headed to the airport to fly home to Germany at the end of their assignment.

Including the unknown driver of the taxi, six people were killed in the attack, which Afghan officials blamed on Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network.

Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Lobbering, spokesman for the 5,000-strong International Security

Assistance Force for Kabul (ISAF), told reporters that warnings were received daily, making it hard to know which were real and which were false alarms.

"Although we have warnings, and in this particular case we had that beforehand, that something might happen at a certain time, at a certain place, it is always impossible to predict," he said, referring to Saturday's explosion.

"As far as the threat of car bombs is concerned, these threat warnings have been ongoing now for months and months," Lobbering said. ISAF, currently led jointly by Germany and the Netherlands, had no intention of halting its operations despite the worst attack and first suicide bombing against the force since its deployment after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001. —Reuters



An Afghan shepherd boy walks past a smashed window in Kabul at the site of Saturday's suicide car bombing. Six people were killed when a suspected car bomber blew up a bus carrying German soldiers —Reuters

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Muddle East

A road map for Israel-Palestine peace is only a beginning. A long way to go yet

PEACE in the Israel-Palestine conflict is still a hope rather than a certainty, which President George Bush appeared to convey at the Aqaba summit. The prime ministers of Israel and Palestine have accepted working formulas to move forward along the promised road map, which would create two independent states living together in peace. Few, if any, maps ever indicate the reality of the roads they depict; and this road map is no exception. What is certain is that the road ahead would be difficult even if the map gets clearer. Both prime ministers stopped short of committing themselves to any position close to the expectations of the other side. This is not surprising since quite some distance would have to be traversed before the Israelis and Palestinians could walk that road in peace with justice.

Israel prime minister, Ariel Sharon, accepted that unauthorised settlements of Israelis in West Bank and Gaza would be removed but gave no indication of other settlements while talking about the territorial contiguity of the Palestine state. He has accepted a "viable" Palestinian state but stopped short of endorsing its future sovereignty. Palestine's prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, has promised an

end to violence and terrorism which he stated was "against our religion and moral traditions". He promised to "exert all our resources to end the militarisation of the intefada", but did not commit himself to disarmament of the Palestinian cadres. He has set forth the demand for a sovereign state but has not endorsed the idea of Israel's right to exist as a "Jewish state".

Most Indians would have serious reservations about the principle of two independent states created on the basis of religion, given our Partition history. But like we accepted the creation of Pakistan without conceding the two-nation theory, we will need to adopt a pragmatic approach to the evolving situation in the Middle East. Our interest and stakes clearly lie in seeing a honourable, durable settlement of the issues involved. Of the greatest importance is the right of Palestinians to live in dignity, freedom and peace. Given the historical background of the conflict, concerns about the prospects of such a development taking concrete shape in the short term would remain. The silver lining may yet be the role of the US. After the Iraq war, President Bush will be under pressure to find a just solution in the Middle East as early as possible.

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 JUN 2003

SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 2003

W. Arafat
HANDSHAKE IN THE DESERT 10-10 9/16

AS THE MIDDLE East sets out on another long march, charted by the so-called road map, there are two primary reasons why the unlikely partnership of the new Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli convert to peace, Ariel Sharon, gives rise to the hope that this time the flicker of light may survive in the holy land. The first reason is the region's desperate need for a halt to the meaningless bloodshed that has impoverished both sides in the last two and a half years since the Palestine President, Yasser Arafat, declined a workable Israeli offer and indirectly ignited the second *intifada* or uprising. As Mr. Arafat watches from the sidelines, his collaborator of two decades and current favourite of Washington, Mr. Abbas has taken some bold initiatives, including the fashioning of a ceasefire with the militant Islamic outfit, Hamas, which can for now mean a suspension of the horrendous suicide bombing campaign. The second reason why hope (as against optimism) is justified in the present juncture is the powerful prop that the peace effort is receiving. The Bush administration, ideologically harbouring close affinity to the leadership of Mr. Sharon, is demonstrating a rare determination to support the just Palestinian cause, giving up its earlier reluctance to lean on the ultra right regime in Israel which has met every act of desperation by the dispossessed Palestinians with bullets and tanks and ever more land grabbing. The hesitant Abbas-Sharon handshake in the desert sands off the Red Sea, in the presence of a beaming American President, was followed by some vague promises by both the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The next few months will show whether the two sides are ready to make the painful concessions that peace will require and ensure that enemies within do not derail the process. An Israeli Government composed of parties that have been the most vehement opponents of peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians and now pledged to coexistence is the best

guarantee of results. Mr. Arafat, by spurning the generous offer of Ehud Barak during the Clinton Presidency, eased the path for Mr. Sharon and his extreme rightwing groups to come to power. The Sharon Government, whose mandate was renewed earlier this year, has gone on to marginalise the liberal Labour party and launch a vicious twin campaign of grabbing Palestinian territory and expanding Jewish settlements in occupied land. For Mr. Sharon, the more burdensome task at home will be to convince his partners from the orthodox fringe groups. He needs also to come to terms with himself. His remarkable change of heart in recent weeks has shocked not just the outside world but Israelis themselves. Regarded as the father of the illegal settlements which dot the occupied West Bank, he performed an about-face when in an extraordinary speech to his party's parliamentary deputies he called for an end to "occupation," the first time an Israeli leader had used this adjective to qualify the settler landgrab. That acknowledgement was a clear signal that the Bush administration was exerting intense pressure and that its ally, Israel, was bowing to it.

The basic feature of the road map is the requirement of simultaneity of action by the Palestinians and Israelis. At the Aqaba summit, Mr. Sharon committed Israel to the creation of a viable Palestinian state on contiguous territory — of vital importance to the Palestinians — and Mr. Abbas declared an end to the *intifada* of the past 33 months which has claimed more than 3,000 lives and led to retaliatory action that has seen the destruction and reoccupation of Palestinian towns. Mr. Abbas also promised to combat terrorism. Doubts have been raised about the capacity of the two intimate enemies to keep their promises. But with the U.S. appearing determined to pursue peace and ready to lean heavily on Israel if needed, there is no reason why the new flicker of hope should not begin to spread and end the Palestinians' half a century of agony.

- 7 JUN 2003

THE FINDO

Abbas, Sharon face domestic storms

By Atul Aneja

AQABA (JORDAN), JUNE 5. Within hours of the formal revival of the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, were reminded of the strong opposition that they should expect to meet in enforcing a U.S. brokered peace deal.

For Mr. Sharon, the Israeli "settlers lobby" was up in arms, soon after the Israeli Premier signalled during the summit here that he intended to pull down, not only the caravan outposts but a substantial number of permanent Israeli settlements deep inside Palestinian territory.

During his address at the summit, Mr. Sharon said that he understood the Palestinian concern for having a contiguous stretch of territory in their possession to realise a viable Palestinian State. His statement if translated on ground would mean pulling down a large number of settlements, especially in the Palestinian administered West Bank area which block this territorial continuity. For many of Mr. Sharon's supporters who had backed him because he, at one time, had been a strong advocate of pushing in settlements, his statement is being interpreted as an act of betrayal.

While Mr. Sharon faces the prospects of meeting the settlers' wrath, Mr. Abbas too has stirred emotions by declaring



THE DAY AFTER: Militants of the Hamas taking out a march in Nablus on Thursday accusing the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, of selling out their interests in the Aqaba summit. — AP

that he wants the extremist Palestinian groups to give up their weapons. Organisations such as the Hamas, which have led a suicide bombing campaign against Israelis, had hinted that they were prepared to ceasefire against Israelis. But within hours of Mr. Abbas' address, they have declared their disinclination to disarm. Analysts point out that both Mr. Sharon and Mr. Abbas can ride out the immediate storms that they face from their domestic constituencies.

Opinion polls have shown that a majority of Israelis, though sceptical of success, are willing to give the Israeli Prime Minister a chance. Besides, with the opposition Labour party

pledging its support for the peace "road map," Mr. Sharon is on a secure political wicket even if he takes steps that many in his right-wing coalition oppose. In other words, Mr. Sharon will have enough Knesset (Israeli Parliament) members supporting him to survive, even if his own right wing partners decide to distance themselves from him.

For Mr. Abbas, recent changes on the ground have strengthened his hand to engage the Hamas on a fairly even footing. Saudi Arabia, after the bombings in Riyadh last month has decided to curb any financial assistance to the Hamas from its soil.

This has weakened the Ha-

mas considerably. Analysts point out that Mr. Abbas has a good chance of dealing successfully with the Hamas by combining coercion with co-option. While force at some point of time might become necessary against the extreme hardliners, Mr. Abbas could win many of the Hamas cadres over to his side by accommodating them in some of the new Palestinian institutional structures that are likely to emerge, provided they pledge to shed violence. The challenge to Mr. Abbas to implement the peace process, however, is expected to deepen in the longer run.

Both the Israeli Prime Minister and the U.S. President, George Bush, in their addresses on Wednesday hinted that they were not in favour of the right of Palestinian refugees, displaced mainly by earlier wars, to return to the Israeli mainland. Both Mr. Sharon and Mr. Bush referred to the right of Israel to exist as a 'Jewish' State.

That virtually ruled out the return of the refugees to Israeli territory, for the re-influx of nearly 4.5 million refugees would undermine the Jewish character of Israel. Two other key hurdles face Israel, the United States and the Palestinians, once the peace process unfolds.

First, both Tel Aviv and Washington may yet be unprepared to defuse the threat posed from the Iran and Syria backed Hizbollah group that operates from Lebanon, on Israel's northern border.

- 6 JUN 2003

THE HINDU

'INTIFADA AGAINST ISRAELIS WILL END'

Sharon, Abbas back U.S. road map for peace

By Atul Aneja

AQABA (JORDAN), JUNE 4. In a landmark summit, Israelis and Palestinians, under the stewardship of the United States, have decided after a three-year interruption, to shed violence and revive their stalled peace process.

Even cynics, who have witnessed the hopes and failures of earlier Israeli-Palestinian engagements, felt that the revived initiative might work. Not only did the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, declare their political support for the peace road map, whose principal author has been the U.S., they went far ahead to address each other's core concerns.

Mr. Abbas directly addressed Israel's anxieties about the security of its citizens who had been the victims of Palestinian suicide attacks and other forms of terror. "We repeat our denunciation and renunciation of terrorism and violence against Israelis wherever they might be," he said in a statement read out at the end of the summit.

Mr. Abbas further announced his intent to end the 'Intifada' (armed uprising) against the Israelis. There was "no military solution to our conflict" and resistance to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands must now acquire a non-violent form.

Signalling that the Palestinian groups would be disarmed, a major Israeli concern, Mr. Abbas declared "we will exert our full efforts using all our resources to end the militarisation of the Intifada and we will succeed": Only designated law upholding authorities would be allowed to possess weapons. In a signal to other countries that have been funding extremist Palestinian groups, Mr. Abbas urged all states fighting terrorism to block "financial and military assistance" to such organisations.

On his part, Mr. Sharon went to considerable length to accommodate Palestinian concerns. Palestinians have been demanding that the Israelis pull out Jewish settlements from the Pal-

estinian administered areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These settlements had segmented Palestinian land, making the realisation of an independent state in this area unviable. The Palestinians have also been asking the Israeli leadership to unequivocally accept the concept of an independent Palestinian State.

Aware of Palestinian sensitivities, Mr. Sharon declared Israel's "strong support" for the U.S. President, George W. Bush's vision of "two states — Israel and Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security." "Unauthorised outposts" of settlers, which were usually on the fringes of bigger and permanent settlements, would be dismantled.

But more significantly, he reassured his "Palestinian partners" that the Israeli side understood the importance of "territorial contiguity for a viable Palestinian state."

By making this remark, Mr. Sharon, analysts say, had signalled his intent to dismantle at least some of the controversial settler colonies situated in considerable depth, mainly inside the Palestinian West Bank area. He also indicated his intention to ease the hardship of Palestinian people brought about by frequent armed blockades and Israeli military incursions into Palestinian territories.

Diplomatic sources here said that Mr. Bush's personal commitment to the peace process that was unrolled today was likely to dissuade it from getting derailed. The U.S. side had already positioned a "monitoring mechanism" that would help encourage the Palestinian and Israeli leaders to fulfil their pledges.

Mr. Bush declared that he had assigned his National Security Adviser, Condoleezza Rice, and Secretary of State, Colin Powell, to monitor and coordinate implementation of the "road map." He appointed John Wolf, a State Department official, as his chief envoy to supervise the nitty gritty and give direction to the monitoring group likely to be positioned inside the Palestinian territories soon.

WEST ASIA / GROUNDWORK ON FOR BUSH SUMMIT

Palestinian PM confident of halting attacks on Israel

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MAY 29. Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, is going ahead with his meeting with the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, tonight in order to lay the groundwork for a peace summit with the U.S. President, George W Bush, next Wednesday.

The meeting between Mr. Sharon and Mr. Abbas, popularly known as Abu Mazen, is expected to discuss the broad principles that would help defuse violence against Israelis and encourage Israel, on its part, to build on its recent declaration accepting an independent Palestinian State.

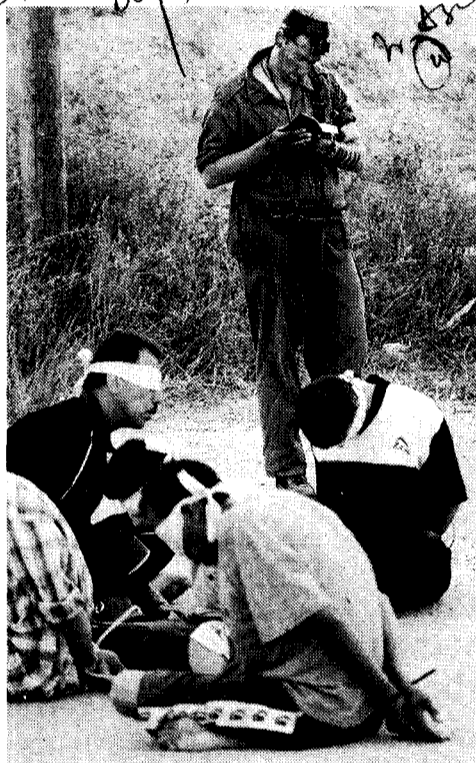
While sharing the sentiment for peace, the two leaders will have to bridge their differences on ways to achieve it.

Israel appears to be nudging Mr. Abbas to crack down on the Palestinian extremists.

That, in turn, means Palestinians taking concrete steps on the ground to arrest leaders of the violent campaign unleashed against Israel, as well as dismantling the infrastructure, including the propaganda machinery, that encourages Palestinians to undertake suicide attacks.

In doing so, the Palestinian security establishment is being encouraged to take on headlong, the extremist group Hamas, which has become the nucleus of a terror campaign against Israeli civilians.

While opposed to suicide attacks against Israelis, Mr. Abbas, at least for now, appears to following a different approach to quieten the Hamas. Instead



An Israeli soldier prays while he guards arrested Palestinians in the southern Israeli checkpoint of Kissufim on Thursday. — AFP

of confronting the Hamas, the Palestinian Prime Minister is keen to engage this group in order to achieve results.

Confident of success, Mr. Abbas told the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* on Thursday that he expected to reach an agreement with Hamas by next week for a complete halt to attacks on Israelis.

The Hamas leadership, on its part, appeared to be backing Mr. Abbas' non-confrontationist approach. Mahmoud Zahar,

a senior Hamas leader said on Thursday that the organisation has set no pre-conditions for discussing a cease-fire agreement with Mr. Abbas next week. Despite its conciliatory signals, the Hamas, is not prepared to surrender all its cards.

Hamas religious leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, on Wednesday told Mr. Abbas that the Hamas will not surrender its weapons until a Palestinian state is declared.

Aware of the Mr. Abbas' difficulties, the Israelis, while pushing the Palestinian Premier to adopt a more muscular approach, may be satisfied if the Palestinians make a cent per cent "effort" to curb violence against Israelis. During the meeting on Thursday night, Mr. Sharon is expected to propose to Mr. Abbas that the Palestinians should take charge of the security of Palestinian areas from where the Israeli army intends to gradually withdraw.

At the end of the meeting, a joint statement is expected where both sides could declare a general ceasefire.

THURSDAY, MAY 29, 2003

A RAY OF HOPE

HP-10 29/5 ✓

THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT'S broad approval of the Middle East peace plan, thereby signalling its acceptance of a Palestinian state for the first time, has raised hopes about the road map, which envisages a final status agreement in 2005. Endorsement by the country's right wing Cabinet was not easy to secure for the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, himself a longstanding champion of the view that there should be no Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The approval, which was won with a 12-7 vote with four abstentions following a heated six-hour debate, could only be secured after the Israeli Cabinet attached 14 reservations to the road map. Soon afterwards, the hardline Israeli Prime Minister surprised even some of his fiercest critics by using the expression "occupation" while referring to his country's presence in the West Bank and Gaza. Defending himself against his own right-wing coalition in Parliament, he said that holding on to territory where three and a half million Palestinians reside was bad for Israel and its economy.

That someone regarded as Israel's most prominent hawk should now talk of dividing the land between "us and the Palestinians" represents a remarkable shift in attitude. Over the last few months, Israel has expressed its unhappiness with almost every important aspect of the road map, particularly with the final phase involving the establishment of a Palestinian state. A major cause for this turnaround is diplomatic pressure from the United States which, having won the war in Iraq, seems to have decided to make the road map the cornerstone for its policy towards the Middle East. At the same time, the U.S. has attempted to reassure its longstanding ally that it will address Israel's concerns about the peace plan during its implementation. The proposed meeting between Mr. Sharon and his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, has been temporarily called off, but the Israeli approval of the road map paves the way for the U.S. President, Ge-

orge W. Bush, to meet the two leaders early next month.

If Mr. Sharon's recent pronouncements have evoked little more than a very cautious optimism, it is because of the very nature of the Middle East situation — which is at once complex and fragile. Ever so often in the past, hopes have been dashed and promising steps have come undone because of various reasons including a lack of commitment, mutual suspicion and acts of violence. Unlike that of the Palestine Authority, which has fully endorsed the road map, Israel has clearly signalled its acceptance is only qualified — a fact that could make its implementation extremely problematic. Not surprisingly, there are serious apprehensions that Mr. Sharon's acceptance of the road map could be but a ploy — a strategic bowing to American pressure in the full knowledge that Mr. Mahmoud Abbas is much too politically weak to crack down on Palestinian militants as required by the peace plan. Although the road map charts out parallel steps for both sides, Tel Aviv has maintained it will not move ahead unless the militant groups cease to attack Israeli targets.

As things stand, it is much too early to hazard a guess about where things will go from here. Even the first phase of the road map — which includes a total renunciation of violence and an Israeli freeze on settlement and withdrawal to pre-violence boundary lines — presents all manner of challenges for those on both sides. Does Mr. Abbas, who is something of a political lightweight, have the wherewithal to disarm the suicide bombers? Will Mr. Sharon dare to offend his domestic constituency and raze the Israeli settlements that he only recently encouraged on Palestinian lands? All in all, it is much too soon to begin speculating that an entirely new chapter is about to begin in the conflict. At the same time, the recent developments provide a ray of hope — something that has been absent in the bleak environment of the Middle East.

29 MAY 2003

THE HINDI

49-14

WEST ASIA / ATTEMPT TO SHORE UP 'ROAD MAP' PLAN

Bush may attend Jordan summit

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MAY 28. The Bush administration is supposed to be giving final touches to the President's visit to West Asia, with reports now speaking of a second summit to be hosted by Jordan.

The White House is being careful even at this point, stressing that the President, George W. Bush's visit to West Asia is under "active consideration" adding that if Mr. Bush's trip were to materialise that would be after the Group of Eight meeting in France. "At this point, there are just some formalities as the President continues to review the exact manner in which he... (can) bring the parties together in bringing peace to the Middle East", the White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, said.

As the President gets ready for his trip to Poland, Russia and France, there is increasing optimism that he would also be attending the "two summits" in West Asia which would send a strong signal to domestic critics and sceptics overseas that this administration does indeed have a policy that is compre-



The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, with the Spanish Foreign Minister, Ana Palacio, in the West Bank city of Ramallah on Wednesday. — AP

hensive in scope.

According to the present scheme of things, Mr. Bush is expected to travel to Sharm el Sheikh in Egypt to meet several Arab leaders including the King of Jordan and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The second summit is being scheduled in Aqaba, which is intended to bring together Mr. Bush, the Is-

raeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen.

West Asia is increasingly becoming a prime focus of this Republican administration and a critical component of this is the Road Map envisioned ultimately leading to a Palestinian state by 2005. But no one here is un-

derestimating or ignoring the potential pitfalls *en route*. For instance, there is already some confusion as to what the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, meant when he said that he was in charge of the peace talks. It is an open secret that this Bush administration deliberately kept Mr. Arafat at a distance and refused to communicate to him on the grounds that he did not do enough to combat terror or in clamping down on militants striking at Israel.

In insisting on changes in the Palestinian leadership, Washington has now signalled willingness to talk to Mr. Abbas. At the same time, the administration has said that it will not abandon the interests of Israel. Along with the West Asia peace process, this Bush administration is also paying a lot of attention to Iran in recent days, especially in the aftermath of the Saudi Arabia bombings that killed 34 people earlier this month.

The White House is stepping up pressure on Iran over the alleged presence of Al-Qaeda operatives in that country even if Teheran is adamant in its denials.

2 MAY 2003

AP

W. Asia peace plan hits a snag

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MAY 27. In a move that could retard the political momentum towards peace talks, the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas has sought the postponement of Wednesday's meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon. While Mr. Abbas wants to put-off this meeting by a day, owing to his stated preoccupation with the visit of the Spanish Foreign Minister, the Israeli side may not accept his explanation at face value.

The Israeli response to the Palestinian "request" to reschedule these talks is likely to have far reaching consequences. Early negotiations between Mr. Abbas and Mr. Sharon are seen necessary to give the "road map" for peace, authored by the U.S., E.U., Russia and the U.N. a decisive push. The U.S. has already indicated that it would want some concrete progress in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship, before making a final decision on holding a summit between the Israeli Prime Minister, the Palestinian Prime Minister, and select leaders of the region.

The meeting between Mr. Abbas and Mr. Sharon was meant precisely to achieve such progress. Mr. Sharon during the course of his talks with Mr. Abbas was expected to hand over the security of the entire Gaza strip, with the exception of two locations including the border crossing between Gaza and Egypt to the Palestinians. This move, in turn would have transformed the prevailing tense atmosphere in both the Israeli

and the Palestinian camps and set the stage for the possible summit, that could still take place as early as June 4.

There are reports that the much talked about U.S. sponsored summit that aims to unroll the road map directed at the creation of an independent Palestinian State by 2005, could be split at two locations. While the U.S. President, George W Bush, could meet Arab leaders such as the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, and Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Abdullah, at the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, his meetings with Mr. Abbas, Mr. Sharon and Jordan's King Abdullah could be held separately at the Jordanian Red Sea port of Aqaba.

Arranging security at Aqaba, however, could be tricky as this area is not far from Iraq and there are apprehensions that it could fall within the Al-Qaeda's terror reach. Among the recent fast-paced developments, Israelis and the Palestinians are paying considerable attention to the U.S. proposal to position its "coordinators" in the Palestinian territories.

Both sides are veering to the view that these officials are likely to play a key role in implementing the "road map" by giving it real teeth. One view prevailing in Israel is that these "coordinators" are likely to discreetly position themselves as part of the Palestinian decision making loop, behind the scenes.

Consequently they would have a real opportunity of restrain extremist activity inside the Palestinian territories that targets Israel.

28 MAY 2003

Israeli 'occupation' of Palestinian territories must end: Sharon

Jerusalem: Unbelievable. That was the word on everyone's lips on Tuesday after Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a champion of Jewish settlements in areas Palestinians want for a state, described Israel's hold on land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as "occupation."

Stunned Israelis and Palestinians are trying to determine whether the veteran warhorse had actually changed stride or just made a tactical move to appease Israel's main ally, the United States.

Mouths dropped along with Mr Sharon's bombshell on Monday when he defended his right-wing government's acceptance of a US-backed peace plan that calls for creation of a Palestinian state by 2005 on land Israel seized in the 1967 West Asia war.

"We don't like the word but this is occupation. To keep 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation is bad for Israel and the Palestinians," Mr Sharon, sounding like a spokesman for an Israeli peace movement, told angry legislators from his Likud party.

A former general, the 75-year-old Sharon has called the West Bank many things before—the biblical land of Israel, the land of Jewish forefathers—but never "occupied," a word Palestinians use as a rallying cry in an uprising for statehood. But few in Israel were taking his new-found word literally. "Deep inside, he doesn't really believe that anything can be done with (Palestinian

President Yasser) Arafat still around," said a veteran Sharon observer who speaks often with the prime minister. "So he says: 'Why should I be the one to screw the Americans over and be the refusenik in peace moves?'" Down deep, he doesn't believe settlements will have to be evacuated, because the Palestinians will torpedo the deal.

Since Mr Sharon first took office in 2001, debates have raged in Israeli living rooms and op-ed pages over whether he would indeed deliver on a pledge to make "painful concessions"—never defined publicly—for peace.

Mr Sharon has famously been dogged for the past 20 years by allegations that he deceived then-Prime Minister Men-

achem Begin about the planned scope of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon. Mr Sharon denies misleading the late Begin. Speculation is rife that in his twilight years, the man nicknamed "the bulldozer" was determined to enter the history books as a peacemaker, emulating Mr Begin who returned the occupied Sinai peninsula to Egypt under landmark peace accords. Sending out mixed signals at the Likud meeting, Mr Sharon pointedly coupled his support of the peace roadmap with a pledge that he would not press on with the plan if the Palestinians did not halt violence against Israelis.

Meanwhile, Israel and the Palestinians on Tuesday delayed a meeting of their prime ministers on the US-backed

roadmap to peace that had been planned for Wednesday, officials on both sides said. Palestinian information minister Nabil Amr said in a statement that the meeting between Mr Sharon and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas had been put off for "technical reasons."

He said he still expected the talks to go ahead at some stage in the next 48 hours. Other Palestinian officials said they hoped the meeting would be on Thursday.

An Israeli political source also said a meeting had been planned on Wednesday but that the Palestinians had sought a postponement because of a visit to the West Bank city of Ramallah by Spanish foreign minister Ana Palacio.



● Sharon's bombshell stuns Israelis, Palestinians

● 'Bulldozer' determined to enter history books as peacemaker

● A tactical move to appease US, feel observers

● Sharon-Abbas meeting put off due to 'technical reasons'

28 MAY 2003

W. Asia (2)
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WEST ASIA / SHARON CABINET DIVIDED OVER ROAD MAP

Pressure on right-wingers to quit

JERUSALEM, MAY 26. The Israeli Defence Minister, Shaul Mofaz, today said by granting qualified approval to the road map for peace in West Asia, the Cabinet has not ratified a binding legal document, rather a "declaration of diplomatic intentions."

Mr Mofaz, who reluctantly voted for the road map in the stormy Cabinet session and has consistently warned that "it is bad for Israel", today told the Army Radio, "We did not vote on an international agreement. In fact, this is not a legal document, there is no sort of commitment here, rather this is a declaration of diplomatic intentions."

"In my view, this is a reality in which we are saying yes to the process, even though the chances are not necessarily high — certainly not in view of the period of time that has transpired since the Abu Mazen Government was established — but we are prepared to go into the process positively."

Mr Mofaz, however, voiced trust that Washington would address Israel's security and other concerns, as embodied in the list of 14 reservations the Government has sent to the

PALESTINIAN STATE BY 2005

Israel's Cabinet approved a US-backed "roadmap for peace", accepting for the first time the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 2005



Bush administration.

"The Americans stated that they are relating to all of Israel's comments fully and seriously, and from this it can be understood that there is very profound commitment with respect to Israel's comments," he said.

The approval of the road map for peace by the Israeli Cabinet yesterday was the first time that an Israeli Government has gone on record supporting the concept of an independent Palesti-

nian state. The three-phased plan envisions the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005 under a land-for-peace deal.

Second meeting

As the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, prepares for a second high-level meeting with his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, he has some homework to do to keep his coalition intact amidst reports of emerging fissures, with demands by far-right lawmakers to bolt the Government.

While Mr Mofaz tried to distance himself from the peace outline, three of the seven National Union lawmakers have urged that their far-right party immediately leave Mr. Sharon's ruling coalition, daily *Ha'aretz* reported today.

In an overnight meeting of the National Union party, the lawmakers, Uri Ariel, Zvi Hendel and Aryeh Eldar, called for withdrawal of the party's support to the Government.

The National Union Cabinet Ministers, Avigdor Lieberman and Benny Elon, who voted against the proposal yesterday, argued against leaving the Government, maintaining that the

move would leave the door open for the centre-left Labour to step into the Cabinet.

Meanwhile, Mr. Sharon asserted his resolve to push the roadmap forward despite his own doubts in what he called was "not a happy decision". "This is not a happy decision," the Prime Minister said yesterday, speaking in Jerusalem.

"We will need to make painful concessions, and if the process moves forward, and I will make every effort to see that it does, we will make painful concessions such as these. But in one sphere there will be no concession, and that is in the sphere of the security of Israel and of its citizens."

"I know that there are doubts. Everyone has doubts. I have doubts as well. But I know one thing. We must try".

Unnamed officials were quoted as saying by the *Ha'aretz* as saying that a planned tripartite summit between the Israeli and Palestinian Prime Ministers and Mr. Bush could be held in Aqaba, Jordan, rather than the previously announced Egyptian Red Sea resort of Sharm al-Sheik. — AP

END TO HOSTILITIES AGAINST TEL AVIV DEMANDED

Israel approves plan for Palestinian State by 2005

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, MAY 25. The Israeli Cabinet, headed by the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, in a stormy session today conditionally endorsed a new peace plan that could end the strife between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Approval for the internationally-brokered "road map" for peace came in a 12-7 vote with four abstentions.

By supporting the "road map" in principle, Israel has for the first time formally accepted the creation of an independent Palestinian state. The peace plan, authored by the United States along with the European Union, Russia and the United Nations as partners, envisages the creation of an independent Palestinian state by 2005 in return for an end to hostilities against Israel. According to diplomatic sources, Israel and the U.S. have been discussing behind closed doors two key conditions under which Tel Aviv would accept the plan.

First, while accepting the creation of a Palestinian state, Is-



Ariel Sharon

rael has been unhappy with the 2005 deadline. From Tel Aviv's point of view, the emergence of the Palestinian state should result not from the declaration of a deadline, but as a consequence of successful negotiations with the Palestinians. Second, Israel is reportedly seeking Washington's backing for opposing the rights of Palestinian refugees to return as envisaged in a 1948 resolution

of the U.N. Analysts point out that Israel, aware of its demographic consequences, would simply not accept the return of the Palestinians refugees to its mainland. Some in the Israeli Cabinet are therefore working on a formulation that could permit the return of the displaced Palestinians only to Palestinian territories slated for statehood, the sources said.

The "road map", despite Israel's qualified support, is expected to unroll only if suicide attacks against Israeli civilians end.

There is some glimmer of hope on this count. For the first time, the Hamas, an extremist Palestinian organisation that has sponsored suicide attacks, said through its spokesperson on Saturday that it would be ready to hold fire against Israeli civilians provided the Israeli troops stopped targeting it. The Hamas "ceasefire" proposal, however, would not cover either the Israeli soldiers or Israeli settlers in the Palestinian areas. This declaration followed a recent meeting between the new

Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Hamas.

Analysts point out that the future of the "road map" would also depend on the disposition towards it by the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, whom Israel and the U.S. want to sideline.

Israel in the past has accused Mr. Arafat of masterminding suicide attacks through the Al Aqsa martyr's brigade belonging to the Fatah faction loyal to him.

Once negotiations begin, they are expected to consider the territorial limits or boundaries of an independent Palestinian state.

Questions are also likely to arise about Israeli settlements inside the "green line" or some of the Palestinian areas that the Palestinians are, at present, expected to self-govern. Sources say that the weight of the "settlers lobby" in Israeli decision-making circles is likely to discourage the Sharon administration from radically altering the status quo on settlements.

119-12
 Bush likely to meet Abbas, Sharon W Asia (10)

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MAY 24. In what could be construed as significant initial comments that have a tremendous bearing on the West Asia peace process, the U.S. President, George W Bush, has said that he is considering a meeting with the Prime Ministers of Israel and Palestine if this would help move the process towards creating a Palestinian state.

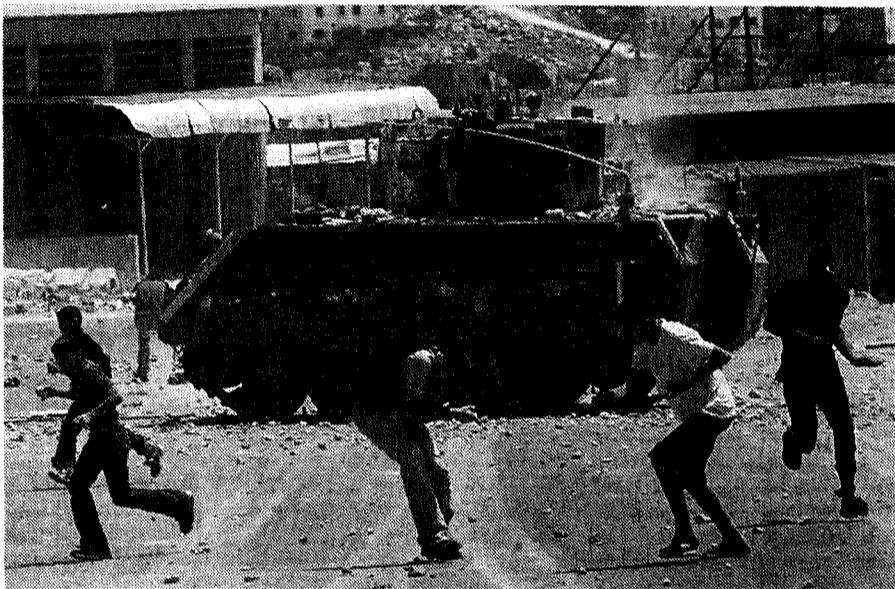
In the course of a press conference, Mr. Bush said that he was "exploring the opportunities" for a meeting with Ariel Sharon of Israel and Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine.

"If a meeting advances progress toward two states living side by side in peace, I will strongly consider such a meeting," Mr. Bush told reporters in Crawford, Texas. "I am committed working toward peace in the Middle East, (West Asia)," he said.

There is speculation in the media that the meeting could come as early as next month at the end of the President's visit to Europe.

But before he made his remarks, the White House released a carefully worded statement in which the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, and the President's National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, acknowledged that Israel has indeed "significant concerns" with the peace plan and promised to address them. Mr. Sharon has accepted the "road map" and the Israeli Cabinet is expected to approve it.

"Prime Minister Sharon accepted the road map, and that's progress. He accepted it because I assured him that the United States is committed to Israel's security", Mr. Bush maintained. "I understand it is going to be difficult to achieve peace, but I



Stone-throwing Palestinians run for cover as an Israeli armoured personnel carrier opens fire in the Balata refugee camp near Nablus on Saturday. — Reuters

believe it can happen", he remarked.

Good sign

Senior administration officials are making the point that the fact that Mr. Sharon has accepted the 'road map' is itself a good sign, especially as it comes in the backdrop of recent terror attacks against the Jewish state.

But no one in Washington is holding out any hope of early breakthroughs in this difficult process.

The Bush administration has gone the distance in marginalising the Palestinian

leader, Yasser Arafat, with Mr. Bush pointedly criticising him for not being tough enough in tackling terror and keeping the militants in check.

But earlier this week Mr. Bush had a telephonic conversation with the new Palestinian Prime Minister and there was even a secret meeting in the Oval Office this Wednesday between Mr. Bush and the Palestinian Finance Minister — the first of sorts for this Republican President.

All this means that this Bush White House is coming to accept the changes on the Palestinian side.

U.N. lifts sanctions against Iraq

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, MAY 22. In a major victory for the Bush administration, the United Nations Security Council has overwhelmingly voted for the lifting of sanctions against Iraq and endorsed the idea of a U.S.-led administration in Baghdad.

The resolution was passed by 14-0 vote with Syria abstaining. The Republican administration was indeed hoping for a unanimous vote; but no one really expected Syria to endorse a resolution that legitimised the "foreign occupation" of an Arab country.

"It's time for the Iraqi people to benefit from their natural resources," the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., John Negroponte, said. The U.S. and Britain reworked the draft several times in order to accommodate the wishes of the other Council members. But in the end, there was little doubt that Washington had its way with the other major powers not wanting to start yet another divisive round.

The resolution essentially legitimises that the U.S. and Britain as occupying powers will remain firmly in control of Iraq until such time an "internationally-recognised representative govern-

ment is established". France, Russia and Germany wanted a higher profile for the U.N. but had to settle for something less. The U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who attended today's historic vote, promised to appoint a special representative soon. And speculation is that the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sergio Vieira de Mello, who has the backing of the Bush administration, will be the choice.

Earlier, there was definite indication that France would not veto the resolution, although its abstention was a possibility. The French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepan, said the resolution opened the door for a central U.N. role and stressed that even if the text of the final resolution did not go far enough, the world body was back in the game.

Council diplomats are hoping that with the lifting of sanctions, Iraqi oil exports will start soon. About eight million barrels of Iraqi oil stored at a port in Turkey can be sold immediately.

The U.S. has agreed to allow Mr. Annan six more months to phase out the oil-for-food programme, which has currently \$13 billion. But the U.N. will have to transfer \$1 billion immediately to a fund controlled by the U.S. and its allies.

23 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

W. Am...
10-21

Israeli troops pull back

21/5

JERUSALEM, MAY 20. Israeli troops pulled to the edges of a Palestinian town in the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, despite five suicide bombings that killed 12 Israelis in 48 hours and endangered a U.S.-backed West Asia peace initiative.

The pullback from Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza suggested Israel is holding off on large-scale retaliation for now, amid international concern that new strikes would further weaken the new Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas.

Mr. Abbas is seen as instrumental in implementing the "road map" to peace plan, a three-stage prescription for ending violence and setting up a Palestinian state by 2005. However, Mr. Abbas has said he will not launch a crackdown on militias — a crucial step in the first phase — until Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, has accepted the plan.



Hiba Daraghmeh (19), an English literature student, who blew herself up at a shopping mall in the Israeli town of Afula on Monday, killing herself and three others and wounding 47.

Mr. Sharon has refused to do so, saying he wants to discuss his objections with the U.S. President, George W. Bush. A Bush-Sharon meeting had been scheduled for Tuesday, but Mr. Sharon postponed his Washing-

ton trip indefinitely because of the bombings.

Mr. Bush remained confident the peace plan can be implemented. "But it is clear that the process is not going to be smooth so long as terrorists kill," he said on Monday.

The Israeli-Palestinian deadlock has left the field to the militants who are trying to torpedo the peace efforts and weaken Mr. Abbas. In the past, the Islamic militant groups, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, have stepped up attacks whenever there was increased hope of progress toward peace.

In the latest bombing, a Palestinian woman, 19-year-old Hiba Daraghmeh, blew herself up at a back entrance of a shopping mall in the northern Israeli town of Afula on Monday. Daraghmeh detonated the explosives as she approached security guards checking shoppers.

✓ TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2003

W W X X X X X
ROADBLOCKS TO PEACE

A ONE-WAY STREET is no dependable road to peace. This is a reality that the U.S. and the other members of the quartet, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations, must acknowledge and act on if they want to see any progress on the road map for peace in the Middle East that they have jointly prepared. Against the several steps that the Palestinians have taken in the past few months, including the effective sidelining of Yasser Arafat, Israel under its hawkish Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, has done next to nothing. And when it did appear as if there was room for optimism over the Middle East and there could be some initial movement on the charted road, there is again a setback. A landmark meeting between the Prime Ministers of Israel and Palestine was expected to signal a readiness to break out of the bitterness of the past. Saturday's meeting served to bring on stage a new leader on the Palestinian side but nothing more. Two suicide bombings in Jerusalem were the answer from the Palestinian hardliners to the evolving peace effort. They gave a handle to the Israeli Prime Minister to derail the process before it has even begun in earnest.

Disaster is an inevitable result every time bitter ideological enemies make common cause. For the two hardliners on either side — the Jewish orthodoxy that refuses to accept a Palestinian state and the militant groups like the Hamas which will not recognise the existence of Israel and have resorted to the devastating campaign of suicide bombings — the end result is a welcome halt to implementing a road map that they both reject out of hand. Mr. Sharon has promptly called off a visit to Washington where he would have come under renewed pressure to match the Palestinian side. A second meeting between him and his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas or Abu Mazen, after his return

was expected to move the road map to the second phase. The bombings, within hours of the conclusion of the meeting, have provided justification for a hardening of Israeli policy. Now, until Mr. Abbas is deemed by Israel to be taking strong enough steps to combat terrorism, Mr. Sharon will not embrace the road map. Refusing to acknowledge the stupendous hurdles faced by Mr. Abbas in attempting to rein in the terrorists, Israeli spokesmen have poured scorn on the road map. Mr. Sharon's spokesman has said that Israel "is not facing the map right now but only the trail of blood and terror". Terrorism was the core of the demands made on Mr. Abbas. There was no promise from the Israeli side to the Palestinian demand for genuine reciprocity: that Mr. Sharon commit himself to the road map, end assassination of Palestinian militants and take measures to ease the Israeli stranglehold on Palestinian territory.

MD-10
M/S

The most obvious strategy for the Israeli Prime Minister to pursue is prevarication, with the ultimate objective of sabotaging the road map. Already, the road map's timetable is not being met, with phase one due to end by the end of this month and phase two set to begin in June. By the time phase three is reached (envisaged for 2005), there should be a Palestinian state. Knowing the outcome, the Israeli right led ably by Mr. Sharon seems to be daring the Bush administration to enforce its demands, a tactic that has worked for the Prime Minister over the last two years when the U.S. kept out of the conflict and tilted the scales against the Palestinians. If the road map is not to become a map to nowhere, the U.S. must rise above domestic political considerations and force Israel to comply — and work the plan which is widely regarded as the last chance for enduring peace in the blighted region.

20 MAY 2003

THE HIND

Peace talks put on hold

19-19 By Atul Aneja 19/5

MANAMA, MAY 18. The twin suicide bombings in Jerusalem this morning appeared to have effectively stalled negotiations on the U.S.-backed West Asia peace plan that aims to create an independent Palestinian state by 2005.

At least seven Israelis died, while around 20 were injured when a Palestinian attacker, dressed as religious Jew, blew himself up aboard a bus. Another suicide bomber blocked, at a north-Jerusalem checkpoint, killed himself without causing any serious damage.

A substantial dialogue between the Palestinians and the Israelis on the peace "road map" was expected to kick-off after the visit to Washington by the Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. But Mr. Sharon, who was scheduled to leave for the U.S. on Sunday and hold a meeting with the U.S. President, George W. Bush, on Tuesday, has now put off his visit because of the suicide attacks.

Mr. Sharon was expected to discuss with Mr. Bush Israel's 14 reservations on the U.S. "road map," co-authored by the European Union, Russia and the United Nations. While details of the "road map" are yet to be made public, there are indications that it is likely to encompass in its broad sweep, the foundations for comprehensive regional security. The creation of an independent Palestinian

State in return for an end to hostility towards Israel is apparently the core, but only one aspect of the peace plan. The "road map" is also expected to deal with issues that would guarantee Israeli security along its northern border with Lebanon. That would mean the termination of possible attacks on Israel by the Hizbollah group from the north.

Since the Hizbollah is supported by Syria and Iran, the participation of Damascus and Teheran in the deliberation of this peace plan would also, at some stage, become inevitable. Israel's neighbours, Lebanon and Syria, on their part, are looking for security against possible attacks on their territory by Israel. For that, they are demanding the Israeli withdrawal from the Shebba farms — a piece of mountainous territory on the tri-junction of the Palestinian territories, Lebanon and Syria. Syria is also seeking the return of the Golan Heights occupied by Israel in 1967.

By positioning themselves along the barren elevations of the Golan, Israeli forces are in a position to bring Damascus within their artillery range. The "road map" is also expected to cover other key issues such as the return of Palestinian refugees who now reside in neighbouring countries such as Syria and Lebanon and size of the financial package to compensate them. The beginning of a dialogue between the Palestinian

Prime Minister, Mohammad Abbas, and the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Sharon, on Saturday night has not been met with much enthusiasm. The Israeli side, during that meeting reportedly asked the Palestinian authorities to take effective steps to curb violence against Israelis. The Palestinian side, on the other hand, insisted that Israel should first relax its military grip on their territories before any effective action could be taken. The Palestinians are also asking Israel to declare their formal acceptance of the "road map" as the first principle for future negotiations.

With Mr. Sharon putting off his visit to Washington, which was expected to result in Israeli recalibration of its disposition towards the "road map" including its formal acceptance, the delicate negotiations have been put on hold indefinitely.

Casablanca bombers jog 9/11

Casablanca, May 17 (Reuters): Forty-one people were killed and scores injured when suicide bombers struck in Morocco's biggest city Casablanca, and President George W. Bush warned the world that al Qaida was "not idle".

A Jewish community centre and a Spanish club were among the targets of Friday's second major attack within a week on an Arab kingdom with historically close ties to the US. Saudi Arabia was hit by multiple suicide bombings on Monday. Three French nationals, two Spaniards and an Italian were reported killed in the night of death and destruction that hit Casablanca, situated on the Atlantic coast and immortalised in the 1942 romantic Hollywood film of the same name.

"International terrorism struck Casablanca tonight," Moroccan interior minister Al Mustapha Sahel was quoted as saying. No group has claimed responsibility, but the apparently coordinated attack threw suspicion on Osama bin Laden's al Qaida. Some attackers made direct raids, but other blasts were triggered by car bombs.

Suicide bombers carried out five attacks and as many as 10 victims may have been assailants, Sahel said, adding that 65 people were wounded.

The blasts came hours after Bush warned of "killers on the loose" as terror alerts spread around the world after the bombings in the Saudi capital. "It is certainly a wake-up call to many that the war on terror continues," he said.

Morocco did not figure on the long list of countries the US and Britain had issued terror warnings about this week.

Bush today warned in a radio

address of possible new attacks from al Qaida, which he said was weakened but "not idle" after US military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As with the Riyadh assault, al Qaida was the top suspect. A US official said it was plausible to suggest al Qaida, which Washington blames for the September 11, 2001 suicide hijackings, was behind the latest strike.

The Riyadh bombings that killed 34 people, including eight Americans, were the first major attack on US and Western interests abroad since the Iraq war. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak had warned that the war would produce "one hundred new bin Ladens".

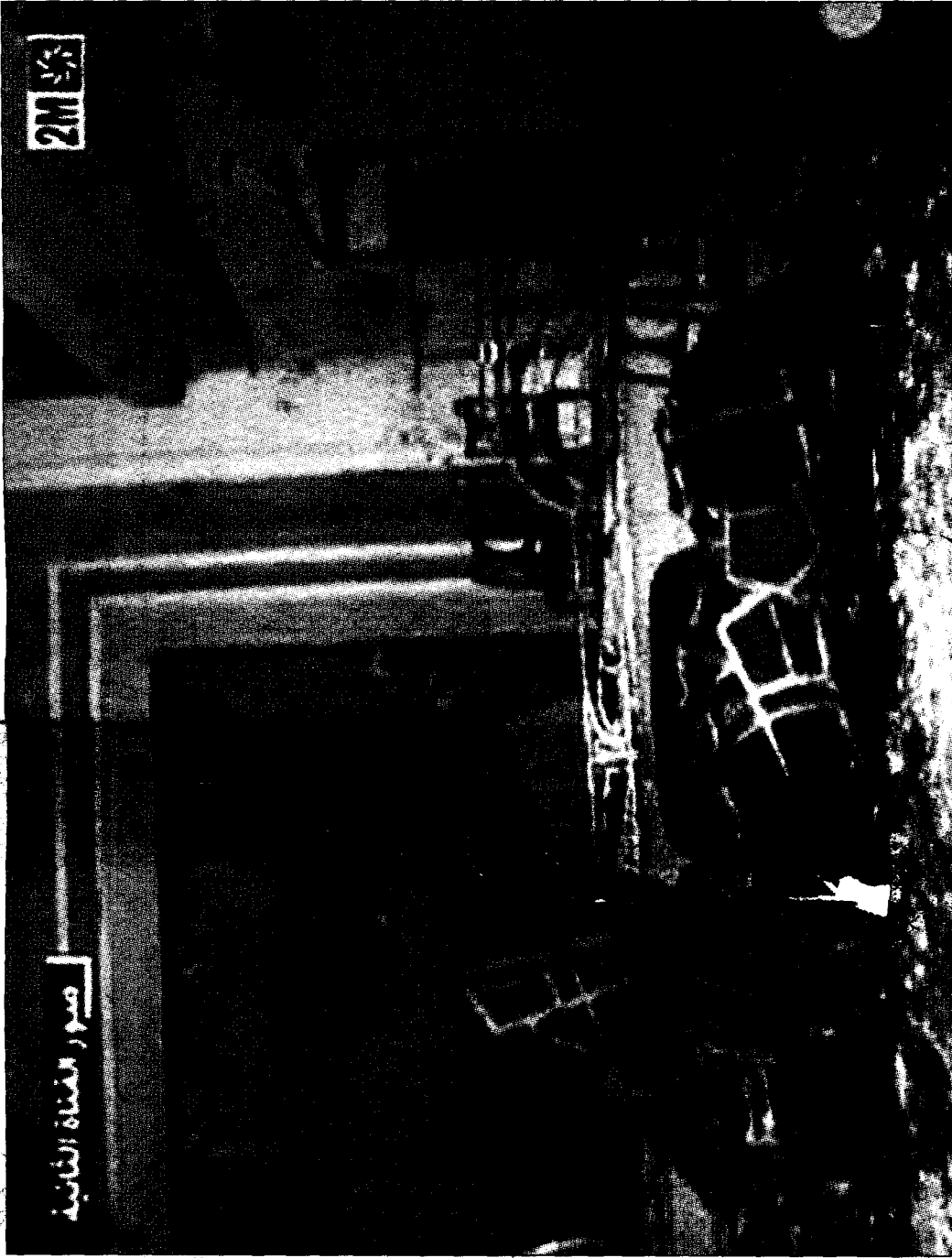
Morocco and Saudi Arabia — bin Laden's birthplace — were among Muslim countries listed as "most eligible for liberation" in a tape said to have been made by the al Qaida leader and broadcast in February.

Some of the Casablanca targets had Jewish connections and one was linked to Spain, which strongly backed the war on Iraq.

Sahel said the Casablanca bombers struck Hotel Safir in the heart of the old city, a Jewish community centre, a Jewish-owned Italian restaurant and the Casa de Espana social club.

A bomb seemingly destined for an old Jewish cemetery appeared to have gone off early. Local journalists said the bulk of the dead were at the club, popular with Spanish business people and diplomats.

"The doorman, poor thing, they cut his head off, like this, with a big knife... then they left one, two bombs. And there were Spaniards. I saw the doorman's chair — it was covered in blood," the secretary of the Casa de Espana Spanish social club told



A television grab shows the damaged interior of Hotel Safir after the blast. (Reuters)

Spain's state radio. "And they left a big knife. Then inside there was, I don't know, flesh — flesh all over the place."

Hotel Safir security chief said two assailants burst in and were stopped by the staff. "One of them stabbed one of my agents with a knife, the other agent

tried to get hold of the second attacker and that's when he blew himself up."

Sahel was quoted as saying that three Moroccans had been arrested, among them one suspected of attempting a suicide bombing.

In recent days, the US and

picked up by US eavesdropping appeared to be "more consistent, more repetitive" about another attack than it was before the Saudi bombings.

The bombings shattered Morocco's image of a stable country and safe tourist destination.

■ See Page 5

WEST ASIA / SLIGHTED SAED EREKAT QUILTS

Stage set for landmark summit

JERUSALEM, MAY 16. The top Palestinian negotiator, Saed Erekat, submitted his resignation on Friday, officials said, after being excluded from an Israeli-Palestinian summit scheduled for Saturday, the first since 2000.

Mr. Erekat's resignation seemed to be connected largely to personal rivalries, rather than differences on policy.

However, it could also signal a division in the Palestinian leadership.

Mr. Erekat, who has no power base of his own, is close to the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, and was only reluctantly included in the new Cabinet of the Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, as Minister for Negotiations.

Israel and the United States have boycotted Mr. Arafat, saying he is linked with terrorism, and see Mr. Abbas as their negotiating partner.

Mr. Abbas chose not to take Mr. Erekat along to his meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon.

Instead, he will be accompanied by the Palestinian Parliament Speaker, Ahmed Qureia, and by his security chief, former Gaza strongman, Mohammed Dahlan.

Mr. Erekat declined to discuss the reasons for submitting his resignation. He has played a prominent role in Israeli-Palestinian talks for the past decade,



Israeli Arabs protest the Sharon Government's action against comrades of the Islamic Movement, in Umm El-Fahm, near Tel Aviv, on Friday. The movement is accused of laundering money for Hamas. — AFP

often serving as the Palestinians' spokesman. He has at-

tempted to resign in the past, but not followed through. Mr. Sharon, meanwhile, met key advisers on Friday to gear up for the meeting, the first top-level talks between the two sides since Israeli-Palestinian violence broke out in September 2000.

The Israeli Justice Minister, Tommy Lapid, who is to join Saturday's talks, laid out tough starting points.

"We want to see what Abu Mazen (Abbas) is going to do, especially in terms of the war on terror," Mr. Lapid said.

"In the meantime, when we're being shelled from Gaza, I'm not sure that it's the right time to make gestures to the Palestinians."

Israeli troops continued on Friday to patrol the Gaza town of Beit Hanoun in an effort to stop Palestinian militants from firing rockets across the fence with Israel.

Despite the military push, a rocket fired from Gaza landed in an open area of Israel's Negev desert overnight, causing no damage or injuries.

In other violence, a Palestinian was killed in the southern Gaza town of Rafah. An army spokesman said soldiers shot the man as he ran toward an army post in an off-limits area.

The Palestinians have accepted the road map plan, but Israel has posed 15 objections, mainly insisting that Palestinians crack down on violent groups before anything else happens. — AP

THE HINDU

17 MAY 2003

Powell meets Sharon,¹¹⁻⁹ pins hopes on peace plan^{12/5}

Jerusalem: US secretary of state Colin Powell launched a fresh round of talks on Sunday aimed at persuading wary Israeli and Palestinian leaders to start implementing a US-backed roadmap for West Asia peace.

Mr Powell, leading the highest-level US peacemaking effort in more than a year, met Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon in Jerusalem before he was due to see Palestinian prime minister Mahmoud Abbas in the West Bank town of Jericho.

Expectations for a breakthrough were low because of the gulf of mistrust between the two sides, sharp differences on key issues and scepticism about US commitment. Numerous earlier diplomatic initiatives have failed to end the conflict.

Mr Powell began his mission late on Saturday with an appeal to both sides to take quick conciliatory steps and not get bogged down in squabbling over the plan.

"There is enough agreement on the roadmap that we can get started," Mr Powell said at the start of the regional visit which he said signalled President George W. Bush's determination to move forward on Israeli-Palestinian peace after the Iraq war.

"There is a need to end terror now. There is a need to take some steps that will make life a little better for the Palestinian people," Mr Powell told a news conference.

After 31 months of bloodshed, neither side was anxious to make the first move. Just hours after Mr Powell's arrival, Palestinian gunmen killed a settler driving near the Jewish settlement of Ofra in the West Bank, police said.

Settlements on land captured by Israel in the 1967 West Asia war have been frequent targets of militants who have rejected the roadmap and vowed to keep up their armed uprising.

Sources close to Mr Sharon said even be-

fore the shooting that Israel would balk at troop pullbacks prescribed by the roadmap until the new Palestinian government reined in militant groups.

Instead, the sources said, Mr Sharon planned several humanitarian gestures such as restoring Palestinian fishing rights off Gaza, easing the transfer of goods between Israel and Palestinian areas, and releasing several dozen detainees.

Shortly after Mr Powell's arrival, the army said Palestinian labourers, temporarily barred from Israel during a security alert for recent Israeli holidays, could return to work.

But Israeli roadblocks remain around Palestinian cities, a measure Israel says helps stop suicide bombers from reaching its cities. Palestinians condemn it as collective punishment.

Palestinian officials said the Israeli actions were not enough. "Israel has to withdraw from Palestinian cities," Nabil Abu Rdainah, an aide to President Yasser Arafat, told Reuters.

Mr Powell and Mr Sharon smiled and shook hands for the cameras before starting talks at the prime minister's residence. On Sunday afternoon, Mr Powell was to meet Mr Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, a US favourite who took office on April 30.

The venue was switched to Jericho from Ramallah, headquarters of President Mr Arafat, whom Washington shuns over his alleged support for violence, denies the charge.

The Palestinians have accepted the roadmap, a three-stage plan based on reciprocal steps to end violence and create a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip by 2005.

Israel has raised 15 reservations about the plan, also sponsored by Russia, the European Union and United Nations. Reuters

1 2 MAY 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Many children trapped in dormitory

CELIKISUYU (TURKEY), MAY 1. A strong earthquake shook south-eastern Turkey on Thursday, killing at least 84 people and injuring 390 others. Rescuers dug frantically in the rubble of a school dormitory, hunting for more than 100 children believed trapped.

Several dozen children had already been saved from the debris of the boys' school. Hundreds of terrified parents prayed and screamed, waiting for news of their children.

The Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said at least 84 people were killed, while the Housing Minister, Zeki Ergezen, said the toll could be 150 throughout the region.

School collapses

Crews were working to rescue more than 100 primary and middle school students still buried under the four-story dormitory that collapsed in the village of Celtiksuyu. By midday Thursday, 72 children were rescued, said a rescue worker. He said the voices of children screaming could be heard from the debris.

"We hope another 50 students will be saved," he said, adding that many were feared dead. The headmaster said 198 students — aged 7 to 16 — were sleeping in the dormitory when the quake hit. Five students and one teacher were found dead, said the Bingol Mayor, Feyzullah Karaaslan. "My friends are waiting for help in there. They were calling for help as they were pulling me out," 12-year-old Veysel Dagdelen was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency after he was rescued from the debris.

The magnitude-6.4 earthquake struck around 3:27 a.m. (0027 GMT) on Thursday and was centred just outside the city of Bingol, 700 km east of Ankara, the Kandilli seismology center in Istanbul said.

Bridge destroyed

At least 25 buildings and a bridge collapsed in the centre



Rescuers extricating a trapped victim from the rubbles of a boarding school which collapsed in the earthquake that rocked Turkey's eastern province of Bigol on Thursday. — AFP

Damage could be seen throughout the city, where the streets were filled with terrified residents. Bingol is a largely rural poor area in the predominantly Kurdish southeast that suffered for years from the fierce fighting between the Turkish army and Kurdish autonomy-seeking rebels. The earthquake damaged power and telephone lines in the area. More than 100 aftershocks hit the region, and rescue workers were unable to reach many villages.

At the remnants of the school dorm, soldiers, rescuers and locals worked their way through the debris with cranes and jackhammers to try to save surviving students. Many students were being treated for their injuries on mattresses laid out near the flattened building.

Naim Gencgul, a 15-year-old boy, was pulled out of the rubble with a broken arm. "The whole building was on top of me. We all started screaming," he said.

boy was carried out on a stretcher to check if their children had been saved. Most of the children are sons of poor farmers from nearby villages that do not have schools and are difficult of access. Parents questioned the quality of the school's construction. "The stable I built did not collapse, but the school did," said Abdullah Gunala, the father of a rescued student.

Mr. Erdogan visited the quake area, and said proper inspections had not been carried out and that shoddy material had been used to build the school. "Investigations will be launched and the guilty will be prosecuted," he said.

Thousands of poorly built buildings collapsed when two massive earthquakes struck western Turkey in 1999, killing some 18,000 people. Nazim Karabulut, a resident of Bingol, described the school as a "terrible construction. Nobody ever learned their

hospital appealed for help to deal with the crisis. The hospital was seriously damaged in the quake and scores of injured were being treated outside. "We need every kind of help," said Ilhan Cokabay, chief doctor at the hospital. "Medical supplies, people, whatever."

The Mayor said the city also needed more large tents.

The Red Crescent sent 3,100 tents, 13,000 blankets, as well as mobile kitchens, generators, ambulances, and four tons of food supplies, Anatolia reported. Soldiers, emergency workers and mountaineers with rescue experience were also headed to the area. The temblor was felt in the nearby provinces of Erzincan, Tunceli, Bingol, Erzurum, Kayseri and Sivas.

The quake lasted 17 seconds, said Gulay Barbarasoglu of the Istanbul observatory. Earthquakes are frequent in Turkey, which lies on the North Anatolian fault.

W3 (W)

Intention not to control Iraq: Rumsfeld

W Asia Down H9-14 215

BAGHDAD, MAY 1. The U.S. Secretary of Defence, Donald H. Rumsfeld, operating out of a palace that once belonged to the ousted President, Saddam Hussein, assured Iraqis that the U.S. was eager to return the country to their control.

"Iraq belongs to you," Mr. Rumsfeld, the highest-ranking U.S. administration official to visit the Iraqi capital, said in a message broadcast over radio and television in the Baghdad area on Wednesday. "The coalition has no intention of owning or running Iraq."

On Thursday, Mr. Rumsfeld met briefly in Kuwait City the Kuwaiti Emir, Sheik Jaber Al Ahmed Al Sabah, telling him he had a good visit to Baghdad.

"The single most vivid impression is that the regime of Mr. Hussein did very poorly for the people of Iraq," Mr. Rumsfeld said. "It put the money into the wrong thing. The country is run down."

Mr. Rumsfeld's visit to Iraq came amid further bloodshed in the city of Fallujah, west of Baghdad, where U.S. soldiers fired on anti-American protesters for the second time this week. The Mayor said two people were killed and 18 wounded in the Sunni Muslim city and Ba'ath Party stronghold 50 km west of Baghdad. Marchers were protesting a Monday night shooting that hospital officials said killed 13 Iraqis.

Mr. Rumsfeld told American troops that the administration of the President, George W. Bush, was actively encouraging countries to turn over Iraqi fugitives. "My impression is some (countries) that were accepting them are no longer, which is a good start," Mr. Rumsfeld told a rally at Baghdad airport, formerly called Saddam International. The Defence Secretary had previously accused Syria of allowing former members of the regime to cross its borders. He also called on Iraqis to tell coalition soldiers about former Iraqi officials and foreign fighters who might still be in their neighbourhoods. Mr. Rumsfeld praised U.S. troops and said they had "unleashed events that will unquestionably shape the course of this country." — AP



The U.S. Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, signs a Baghdad road sign at the request of a soldier in Baghdad on Thursday. — Reuters

2 MAY 2003

THE HINDY

W.A.A. (1)

W. ASIA PEACE PROCESS / U.S. UNVEILS 'ROAD MAP'

Bush to invite Abbas for talks

By Sridhar Krishnaswami



The European Union special envoy, Miguel Angel Moratinos (centre), the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas (left), and the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, in Ramallah on Thursday. — Reuters

WASHINGTON, MAY 1. The White House has said that the new Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, will be invited to Washington for talks with the President, George W. Bush. However, no firm date has been set.

It has been the policy of the Bush administration to keep the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, away from any formal meeting, and at a distance from the evolving diplomacy in West Asia. Mr. Bush went to the extent of accusing Mr. Arafat of having a hand in the violence against Israel. With the swearing-in of new Palestinian leaders, the Bush administration is unveiling its "Road Map" which has been developed with the European Union, the United Nations and Russia. It envisions the establishment of a formal Palestinian State by 2005 and a rollback of all Israeli settlements. The ultimate goal envisions Israel and the state of Palestine living side-by-side in peace.

The schedule for 2005 means that Israel has to transfer the West Bank and Gaza Strip to the Palestinians; but Washington has not committed itself openly at this time on the status of Jerusalem, which by any account, is a highly contentious and emotionally explosive issue. The Secretary of State, Colin Powell, spoke to Mr. Abbas as also to the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, on Wednesday. Gen. Powell will be meeting the two later this month.

The Bush administration has come under increasing pressure from its allies in Europe and across West Asia for failing to be diplomatically active in the peace process

Now that the military phase of the Iraq conflict is over, attention is on Washington's ability to keep at the West Asia peace process. This has raised the question on whether Mr. Abbas could effectively fight violence from within his movement and outside.

The formal presentation of the Road Map to the Israelis and the Palestinians came a day after the violent incident in a Tel Aviv restaurant, which resulted in the killing of a The State Department said that the attack would not derail the peace effort. Gen. Powell is leaving for Spain on Thursday and from there to Albania, Syria

Abbas takes office; blast rocks Tel Aviv

RAMALLAH, APRIL 30. The reformist Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, took office today in a key step toward a U.S.-backed "road map" for West Asia peace, the official Palestinian news agency said.

Palestinian authorities admitted only television crews, without their mobile phones, into the packed swearing-in ceremony at the battered headquarters of the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, in Ramallah. But a reporter from the official Palestinian news agency Wafa told Reuters that Mr. Abbas was the first Minister to be sworn in today.

The landmark ceremony had already been marred by a new Palestinian suicide bombing in Tel Aviv early today, in which the bomber killed three people. The attack underlined the formidable challenge Mr. Abbas faces to curb militant violence in a 31-month-old Palestinian uprising.

Mr. Abbas is the first-ever Palestinian Prime Minister, a post Mr. Arafat created under international pressure to cede some powers and implement democratic reforms.

His Cabinet includes both critics of Mr. Arafat and loyalists from within his Fatah movement. **REUTERS**

The United Nations envoy to West Asia, Terje Larsen, told reporters that the "road map" would be presented to Mr. Abbas later on Wednesday evening. Palestinian officials said Israel would also receive the plan the same day, though Israeli officials could not confirm that.

A militia tied to Mr. Abbas' own Fatah movement claimed responsibility for the Tel Aviv bombing, along with the Islamic militant group Hamas. A spokesman for the



The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, shakes hands with Mohammad Dahlan, internal Security Chief, while the Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas (left), looks on during the swearing-in of Mr. Abbas' government in Ramallah on Wednesday. — AFP

Fatah-linked militia, the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, said the attack was a message to Mr. Abbas that "nobody can disarm the resistance movements without a political solution".

Arriving at the West Bank headquarters of Mr. Arafat, ahead of his swearing-in on Wednesday, Mr. Abbas said, "We condemn this attack strongly."

In his inaugural speech to the Palestinian Parliament on Tuesday, Mr. Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, hinted at a future

crackdown on militias, saying that "the unauthorised possession of weapons ... is a major concern that will be relentlessly addressed."

The bomber, who the Al Aqsa spokesman said came from the West Bank town of Tul-karem, struck on Tel Aviv's seaside promenade in the early hours on Wednesday, blowing himself up outside a pub and restaurant popular with foreigners and just a few metres from the heavily guarded U.S. Embassy. — Reuters/AP

Israel lowers alert against Iraqi threat

Jerusalem: Israel on Sunday lowered its state of alert for a possible Iraqi missile strike in retaliation for the US-led war on Iraq, telling Israelis they could stow their gas masks and dismantle sealed rooms.

Israel had feared it could be targeted as it was in the US-led 1991 Gulf War when Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles at the Jewish state.

But Israelis had largely ignored the call to carry their army-issued gas mask kits to work and school during the state of alert, apparently trusting the analysis of military commentators who said the probability of an Iraqi strike was extremely low.

Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz lowered the alert due to the presence of US troops at potential missile launch sites in western Iraq, his ministry said in a statement.

"Due to the fact that coalition (US and British) forces have scoured these

sites, and on the assessment of military intelligence that the threat against Israel has been lifted...the general population is no longer obligated to carry gas masks or maintain sealed rooms," the ministry said.

The ministry said it would free reserve units called in for duty just before the start of the war on March 20, but would keep Israel's Arrow anti-missile batteries in place until further notice.

Mr Mofaz, who tried to set a personal example by being photographed with his gas mask kit in recent days, had been criticised for maintaining the costly state of alert well after Baghdad fell to US troops last week.

Israeli commentators noted the orders to take the masks out of their plastic wrappers and attach their filters would hasten their expiry date and force the army to replace the equipment at a high cost to the already ailing economy. Reuters

14 APR 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Israel for resuming talks with Palestinians

49-141 303
UNITED NATIONS, MARCH 29. Israel's new Foreign Minister said Israel was trying to find out whether there was a possibility of resuming negotiations with the Palestinians after a lapse of more than two years.

Silvan Shalom said on Friday he made known Israel's desire in a talk with the U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who has been involved in trying to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, along with Russia, the European Union and the United States.

"We want to do everything to improve the relationship of Israel and the United Nations," said Mr. Shalom.

He also said Israel wanted to be part of a U.N. effort to alleviate the suffering in Iraq, such as offering "medical equipment and any kind of supply that can relieve the situation for the Iraqi people there." Mr. Shalom indicated that the Palestinian Authority's recent appointment of the moderate Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, as Prime Minister might offer a chance for renewed talks. Israel has said it will not talk with the authority's leader, Yasser Arafat.

"I told him (Annan) that we are looking forward to see if there is a possibility to resume the negotiations with the Palestinians after the new nomination of Abu Mazen and we will have to wait and see after he forms his new Cabinet in two or three weeks from today," Mr. Shalom said.

Mr. Shalom became Foreign Minister after the Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, won re-election in January.

Israeli negotiations with the Palestinians broke off in January 2001 after talks in Taba. The Palestinian uprising broke out in September 2001, and violence has not let up since. Mr. Sharon has said Israel will not talk until violence stops and he considers Mr. Arafat irrelevant. He has demanded Palestinian reforms, such as the appointment of a Prime Minister with clout.

Mr. Shalom's talk of restarting negotiations with the Palestinians comes as the U.S. President, George W. Bush, and the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, coalition partners in the war against Iraq, have spoken of the need to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair have said a settlement should be reached through a "road map" for peace put together by the diplomatic quartet of Mr. Annan, the E.U., the U.S., and Russia — AP..

30 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

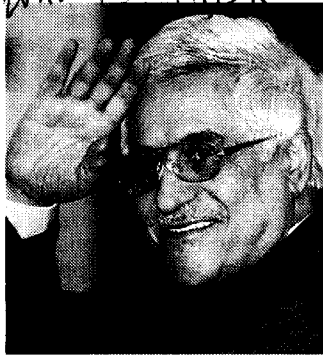
Arafat appoints deputy as PM

RAMALLAH, MARCH 19. The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, appointed his long-time deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, as Prime Minister on Wednesday, a senior official said, marking the first time that Mr. Arafat has been forced to share power.

Mr. Arafat sent a letter to Mr. Abbas, asking him to form a new Cabinet, said the Palestinian Cabinet Minister, Saeb Erekat. Mr. Abbas, widely known as Abu Mazen, has five weeks to complete the task.

Mr. Arafat agreed to appoint a Premier under intense international pressure but tried until the last minute to limit the powers of the new position. On Tuesday, the Palestinian Parliament rebuffed Mr. Arafat's efforts to insert a clause that would have appeared to give him the final say over Cabinet appointments.

According to the legislation



Mahmoud Abbas

creating his post — passed almost unanimously in votes a week apart — Mr. Abbas has the authority to appoint the Cabinet and call it into session, and he is responsible for overseeing its functions. "It's the beginning of a transition — it is certainly a turning point and a qualitative shift in the political culture,"

said the legislator, Hanan Ashrawi. "Now, we have power-sharing that is clearly spelled out." Mr. Arafat remains the overall commander of Palestinian security forces and the broader "Palestinian leadership," a body that includes the Cabinet, PLO leaders and security commanders. Mr. Arafat also retains the final say in peace talks with Israel.

The United States and Israel demanded that Mr. Arafat be sidelined or neutralised, charging that he has not done enough to stop Palestinian attacks against Israelis during 30 months of violence.

The rebellious stance of the Palestinian Parliament — which started the reform wave by forcing Mr. Arafat's Cabinet to resign last June — might help calm Israeli and U.S. concerns that Mr. Arafat still retains most of the power. — AP

20 MAR 2003

BE FINDO

A moment for Rachel in the epoch of war

98.6
19/3/03

TOMAS ALEX TIZON &
LYNN MARSHALL
WASHINGTON, MARCH 18

AT 23, RACHEL Corrie was the person many people dream of becoming: passionate, giving, courageous to the point of risking her life. One-on-one,

friends say, she was as soft as a petal. Which makes the circumstances of her death — crushed by an Israeli army bulldozer on Sunday — all the more brutal for the family and friends she leaves behind in Washington's capital.

Although her supporters stop short of calling her a mar-



Rachel Corrie

tyr, some said her death will fuel the peace movement at a time when war with Iraq looms. Corrie was outside the town of Rafah acting the part of a human shield. She stood in the way of a bulldozer that was about to wreck a Palestinian home. The bulldozer was either digging out bombs (Israel's version) or razing neighbourhoods for a new wall Israel wants to build (the Palestinian version).

Corrie and other peace activists believed the bulldozer would stop. The bulldozer inched forward, lurched and

caused the death of a young girl.
NEWSPAPER
EXPRESS
commented
died for.

Airports 'killer pm

India does not want war: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 11. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has categorically stated India's position again on the Iraq crisis—India does not want war, it is against an attack on Iraq. But in the event of a war breaking out it will meet the situation arising out of it and will ensure that Indian interests are not harmed.

The Prime Minister's comment came at the Bharatiya Janata Party's parliamentary meeting this morning where it was also pointed out that India's position, along with that of more than 100 countries, was stated clearly at the summit of the Non-Aligned Movement at Kuala Lumpur.

Later, the party spokesperson, V.K. Malhotra, briefing reporters said the NAM resolution had also refrained from naming the United States.

He said this against the background of some opposition parties criticising the Government for its "softness" towards the U.S.

But, Mr. Malhotra pointed out, that naming the U.S. was not wise at this stage as there was still a small possibility of the United Nations finally adopting a resolution giving the green signal for a U.S.-led attack on Iraq.

Once again, the focus of the meeting was on party discipline. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, made it clear that the leadership frowned upon any attempt by anyone to lead agitations or protest against declared government policy.

The party president, Venkaiah Naidu, had been authorised to initiate action against anyone guilty of this kind of misconduct.

There was more than a hint

from Mr. Malhotra that the indication this time was that the BJP would not tolerate criticism of and agitation against the Government decision to introduce the Value Added Tax (VAT) to replace sales tax in all the States. There were reports that some party MPs had been planning agitations under the banner of various traders' organisations.

Today's meeting also became the occasion for self-congratulation with Mr. Vajpayee about to complete five continuous years in office from March 19, 1998. Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani gave the credit to the other for the smooth running of the NDA Government in the last five years.

To mark the event, from March 19 to April 6 party MLAs and MPs will tour their constituencies and explain to the people the details of the projects undertaken by the Government.

1 2 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Arafat names moderate leader as PM

GAZA CITY (GAZA STRIP), MARCH 7. Israeli troops seized a chunk of the northern Gaza Strip on Friday and set up key positions there in what an army commander said would be an open-ended stay to try to stop rocket attacks on nearby Israeli towns.

About 100 tanks and other combat vehicles took control of 10 sqkm, lined by two Palestinian towns and a refugee camp, carving out what Israeli military reporters said was a new "security zone." It was the first sizeable reoccupation of a Gaza residential area in 29 months of fighting. In the past, troops have staged quick incursions.

"This action is a little different than the actions we have carried out until now," said an army commander, Col. Yoel Strick. "If we decide it is necessary, we will hold on to this area for the foreseeable future."

In other developments, Mahmoud Abbas — tapped by Yasser Arafat as the new Palestinian Prime Minister — said on Friday it is too early to respond to the offer. "I will be able to respond negatively or positively to President Arafat's proposal when it becomes clear what kind of authorities the Prime Minister will have," Mr. Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, said.

International West Asia mediators have pressured Mr.



The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, and Mahmoud Abbas (right), who has been named Palestinian Prime Minister, seen in this June 2002 file photo.

Arafat to create the position to make him share power and reform the Palestinian Government. The choice of Mr. Abbas could signal that Arafat has giv-

en up on the idea of appointing a weak, non-political Premier, something he was considering earlier. Mr. Abbas has a strong political following and is known

as a moderate. He has publicly called the violent Palestinian uprising a mistake and urges a return to peace negotiations with Israel.

The PLO's Central Council will meet this weekend to approve the idea of creating the position, and the Palestinian legislature will convene next week to define the responsibilities of a Prime Minister.

The Israeli military's Gaza operation is aimed at keeping Palestinian militants from firing small homemade Qassam rockets at Israeli villages and towns just across the fence, the army said.

Troops took up positions in a triangle formed by the towns of Beit Hanoun and Beit Lahia and the refugee camp of Jabalya in northern Gaza, an area covering about 10 sq km said the Palestinian police chief in Gaza, Brig. Gen. Abdel Razak Majaida.

Of that area, 3.7 sq km are actually occupied by Israeli troops, while the remainder is in the sights of Israeli tanks, he said. About 6,000 Palestinians live in that area.

In Beit Lahia, which is closest to the border fence with Israel, 40 tanks and military vehicles were parked on a sandy hill overlooking much of the area. — AP

8 MAR 2003

THE HINDO

Israel rejects Palestinian draft statute

W. K. A. (U)
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JERUSALEM, MARCH 4. Dubbing it an "eyewash", Israel has vehemently criticised the draft Constitution prepared by a Palestinian team, saying it sought to perpetuate conflict and did not reflect an attitude of peace and conciliation.

The daily *Ha'aretz* quoted sources as saying that a legal analysis by Foreign Ministry experts has concluded that the Constitution's preamble includes terms hostile to Israel. Sources further said, "We won't

accept this and neither will the Americans. The terms do not reflect an end to the conflict but a perpetuation of hostilities."

The preamble to the Constitution, which was drafted by the Palestinian Minister, Nabil Sha'ath, says that throughout history, "the Palestinians conducted their legendary *jihad* against the colonial forces of the old and new world," and speaks of "the depth of the wound caused by the superpowers in their handling of the Jewish

problem and division of West Asia, where the Palestinians bore the burden of the arrangements made to reflect the balance of power and the results of the first World War, to this very day."

Israel also rejects Article 2 of the draft, which says the Palestinian state will be established within the June 4, 1967 resolution or "according to international decisions." According to Israeli Government sources, the Palestinians are ignoring previ-

ous agreements, which said the borders would be determined through negotiations and agreements between the sides.

However, Government sources are reported to have admitted that the article concerning refugees is relatively easy for Israel to accept, since it does not refer to a mass return of refugees to Israel. However, there are reservations regarding the authority vested in the President, giving him veto powers over laws. — UNI

THE HINDU

F 5 MAR 2003

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Hamas founder-leader held

JERUSALEM, MARCH 3. Sheik Mohammed Taha, who was arrested by Israeli troops on Monday, is one of five founders of Hamas and the most senior member of the Islamic militant group to be detained since fighting erupted 29 months ago.

The arrest signalled a turning point in how Israel is dealing with Hamas, which has killed hundreds of Israelis in shootings and bombings since its founding in 1987.

Taha (65), a hardline ideologue and close associate of the Hamas spiritual leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, is the first senior Hamas political leader to be arrested since September 2000, even though the group has been responsible for most of the attacks on Israelis since then.

In retaliating for Hamas

bombings and shootings, Israel has killed dozens of Hamas activists and rounded up hundreds. It has also hit installations of the Palestinian security forces, arguing that Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority is responsible for all attacks because it has failed to rein in militants.

Palestinians say the Israeli raids have been counterproductive, weakening the security forces expected to crack down on Hamas, Arafat's main political rival.

The Israeli Defence Minister, Shaul Mofaz, suggested on Sunday that there would be a change in direction. "In the Gaza Strip, we are increasing the pressure and the scope of our operations against Hamas ... and we will also operate that

way in the West Bank," Mr. Mofaz said. "We want to arrive at a situation where the terror organizations invest more and more (effort) defending themselves."

Taha and his five sons — all senior Hamas activists — were caught off guard by the Israeli arrest raid on Gaza's Bureij refugee camp early on Monday. Taha and his son, Ayman, were wounded in fighting that erupted when soldiers surrounded the family's home which was later demolished.

8 Palestinians killed

Meanwhile, Eight Palestinians, including a nine-month pregnant woman and a child, were killed and some 35 wounded as Israeli armour staged a new large-scale raid into the Gaza Strip. — AFP

BANNED WEAPONS / INSPECTORS SUPERVISE PROCESS

Iraq scraps six more missiles

BAGHDAD, MARCH 3. Amer al-Saadi, an adviser to the Iraqi President, Saddam Hussein, has said that excavations carried out in recent weeks at sites near Baghdad proved that Iraq had destroyed "important quantities" of the banned VX and anthrax substances even as a spokesman for the U.N. Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission headed today to a site to oversee the destruction of more Al-Samoud 2 missiles.

The chief weapons inspector, Hans Blix, who will make a crucial report on Friday to the U.N. Security Council on Iraqi compliance, said destruction of the missiles would be "a significant piece of real disarmament". Iraq scrapped six more banned Al-Samoud 2 missiles on Monday, a senior official said, bringing the total in three days to 16. Uday al-Tai, the director general of Iraq's Information Ministry, said six out of at least seven scheduled to be disposed of during the day had been destroyed by midday.

The U.N. inspectors are supervising the process, which meets one of the major U.N. demands on Iraqi disarmament. Baghdad says there are about



German troops specialising in nuclear and biological warfare take part in an exercise in Kuwait recently. — Reuters

100 Al-Samoud 2 missiles, which U.N. experts say are banned because they breach the 150-km range limit set by previous resolutions. Meanwhile, a U.N. spokesman said, "The destruction of Al-Samoud

2 missiles as well as casting chambers is continuing. We think by tomorrow the destruction of the casting chambers would be completed".

Pope to address U.N.

Pope John Paul II will ask to address the U.N. Security Council in person if his message to the U.S. President, George W. Bush, fails to stop Washington's Iraq war plans, a Vatican source said on Monday.

The question of a personal address was already brought up in talks two weeks ago between the Pope and the U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, the source said.

Cardinal Pio Laghi, a friend of the Bush family, left for Washington on

Monday with a message as the pontiff tries to stave off a war. In recent weeks, John Paul has received a series of European leaders, and also sent an envoy to Iraq as part of his diplomatic drive to stave off a conflict. — AP, AFP, Reuters

4 MAR 2003

Israel divides Gaza into three

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JERUSALEM, FEB. 20. Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian in a West Bank town, and carried out house-to-house searches in another on Thursday. In the Gaza Strip, troops divided the territory into three parts, though some Palestinians evaded the barriers by travelling along the Mediterranean beachfront.

The operations were part of Israel's stepped up efforts against the militant Islamic group Hamas, which killed four soldiers in an attack on a tank last Saturday in Gaza. Despite the latest upsurge in violence, Israelis and Palestinians have been holding increased contacts on the possibility of a cease-fire, though no breakthroughs have been achieved.

In London, William Burns, a U.S. State Department official, met Palestinian Cabinet Ministers on Wednesday to discuss a U.S.-backed peace plan that envisions the creation of a Palestinian state in about three years.

Mr. Burns told the Palestinians that formal discussions on the plan would not resume until after Israel forms a new Government — a process that could take several more weeks — and would also depend on developments in Iraq,

said the Palestinian Minister, Saeb Erekat, one of the participants. The Palestinians asked the U.S. to send international monitors in the meantime, to protect Palestinian civilians during Israeli military offensives, but Mr. Burns said Washington did not support such an idea.

In the West Bank, Israeli soldiers entered Tul-karem early on Thursday in an apparent search for militants and killed a 24-year-old Palestinian. The army said the man was armed, but Palestinians said he was an unarmed Hamas supporter who happened to be standing near the Palestinian wanted by Israel.

In Nablus, the largest West Bank city, Israeli soldiers went door-to-door through the narrow streets of the Old City looking for suspects. Soldiers on loudspeakers called on Palestinian residents to hand over wanted men.

The troops used small explosive charges to blow the locks off shops in the Old City, and one gold jewellery workshop was destroyed. In the Gaza Strip, the scene of most of the recent violence, Israeli soldiers built dirt barricades, blocking Gaza's main north-south road and carving the territory into three parts. — AP

THE HINDU

21 FEB 2003

...recovered by the police. In ... (Iraq), the card may not y ...

W/HR/b **Hobson's choice for Turkey** *m/2*

THE CASE of Turkey attempting to drive a hard financial bargain with the United States before it lines up in a probable military invasion of Iraq points to the complexity of the political forces at work in the troubled region. Clearly, it is not just the Arabs who are being squeamish about war, though in the end, each country will have to face up to reality as best as it can if military conflict becomes unavoidable. But for now, Turkey's attitude looks like upsetting the March invasion schedule being discussed on the basis of the negative effects of the hot weather on the proposed military campaign.

If Turkey comes on board, America can open a northern front with Iraq, in addition to the southern front from Kuwait, a natural advantage that alternative options may not permit. But Ankara is being wary. Polls suggest that more than 90 per cent of its populace is opposed to the war. Consequently, Ankara is demanding a hefty \$32 billion aid package from Washington as

its price to support the US war effort, hoping that the development and political spin-offs may help it silence critics in Parliament and outside. The money is to make good losses suffered in the 1991 Gulf war, to feed millions of Iraqi refugees who will most certainly stream in and to repair facilities that may come under attack by Baghdad. These apart, Ankara is tortured by anxieties that its own Kurdish population may coordinate with the Iraqi Kurds to demand sovereignty if Saddam Hussein is toppled.

Washington, however, has not fully yielded to the financial demands. Of course, Ankara will need an aid package even if the UN sanctions the war against Iraq. But denying the US will mean being left out of economic and political plans for a post-Saddam Baghdad. It really is a Hobson's choice and the 48-hour deadline given to Turkey is running out. But the story shows how blood money is counted when great powers arm-twist. Clearly, this is not about principles and scruples.

2 1 FEB 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

Crisis for the Arabs

By Mushirul Hasan

The problem for the Arab world today is liberating most of its countries from authoritarian rule, safeguarding national interests from the growing menace of U.S. imperialism.

119-10
2/2

THE SECOND World War engulfed the Muslim countries: North Africa was the scene of grim battles; Iraq and Syria-Lebanon were occupied by Allied forces who were fighting pro-Axis nationalists in the former and Vichy French in the latter; the Allies also occupied Iran. The Arabs emerged shortly after the war with two new independent republics, Syria and Lebanon, and with Saudi Arabia having become unexpectedly a rich force for its oil resources and American interests therein.

Even though Iraq has gained some breathing space following the Security Council debate, the crescent is faced with a major crisis of a far more serious nature than before. It will not be over soon. Part of the reason is that the crescent is no longer confronted with two or three major powers that were pitted against one another in 19th century diplomacy but a powerful adversary that dictates world society, polity and economy from across the Atlantic. Though it is still unstated by Arab ideologues in such bald terms, for the crescent at least, the U.S. has itself turned into a rogue state targeting a nation and its civilian population that has yet to be proven guilty by the comity of nations represented at the United Nations.

Interestingly enough, George W. Bush and Tony Blair employ the same anti-Iraq and Iran rhetoric that some leading British politicians used against the Turks in the 19th century. Thus, even though official England continued to adhere to the policy of bolstering up the Ottoman empire vis-a-vis Russia, Gladstone talked fiercely in 1880 about how the Turks ought to be cleared out of Europe altogether, bag and baggage, bashaw and bashi-bazouk. Mr. Bush expects Saddam Hussein to do the same, raising imaginary fears of weapons of mass destruction stored under the rubble caused by incessant U.S. bombings. In the late 19th century, massacres of Bulgars and Armenians revived half-forgotten memories of older Ottoman savagery, and the phrase 'unspeakable Turk' was repeated. Today, Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair, who condone Israel's brutal aggression in Palestine, repeatedly talk

of the massacres of Shias and Kurds by the Iraqi regime.

If the alarm bells are not ringing from Cairo to Islamabad, they should do so now. The signs are that the U.S. establishment, acting in unison with Mr. Blair, the enfant terrible of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, is probably ready with a blueprint for redrawing the boundaries of West Asia. The plan may not be implemented in the near future owing to the opposition of France, Germany and Russia, but the U.S. has, as a first step, gained success in cajoling or bullying weak Gulf states into signing scraps of paper. Oman has done it; so has Bahrain. Hoping to use U.S. influence to join the European Union, Turkey has allowed more than easy access to the American troops. The 'Sick Man' of Europe has ceased to be an apt description, but the Turkish Government has time and time again proved to the world that it is ideologically bankrupt, and lacking in the will to pursue its national interests independently of Washington.

How important is the oil factor? I believe the major project is not to capture the oil or gas pipelines. That will, at any rate, be a sequel to a successful military assault on Iraq. The long-term goal of the U.S. right republican regime is to humiliate the Arabs, undermine their self-pride and dignity and bolster the Zionists in Israel. In effect, in the name of combating global terrorism the Bush-Blair combine is preparing to declare war against Islam and the Muslim communities. Baghdad is the first port of halt; Teheran, Kabul and Islamabad will be targeted next.

How then would the Muslim countries face this unprecedented Anglo-Saxon threat to their very survival? Realistically speaking, there are no easy answers especially because pan-Islamism, invented in the last quarter of the 19th century to bolster the tottering Muslim regimes, has ceased to be an effective ideology or even a sen-

timent. Today, the house of Islam is hopelessly divided. How else would you explain the shameful conduct of Turkey, Bahrain, Oman and, above all, Saudi Arabia in allowing access to U.S. troops to conduct their military operations against fellow Muslims? Ironically enough, the royal family in Saudi Arabia is a custodian of the Holy Places of Islam, but not their co-religionists in Iraq. Royalty basks in its medieval glory, while Iraqi children die.

Several Muslim countries, subjected to the oppression of their own feudal and autocratic rulers, must find answers to their own dilemmas and predicaments. But one thing is for sure: their peoples must eschew acts of violence and intimidation under all circumstances. Terrorism has no place in the modern world, for it disturbs the fragile unity that binds nations and communities. Jihad, too, has no contemporary relevance, and those who raise the war cry in the name of religion offend others and cause injury to their own cause. The present-day battles are secular in nature — against poverty, hunger, unemployment, child labour, gender injustice and environmental pollution. To win these battles, we need secular slogans and not dated religious terminologies.

Last Saturday's massive anti-war rallies the world over clearly demonstrated that certain causes cut across religious and territorial boundaries. They cannot be defined as 'Muslim', 'Hindu' or 'Christian', or be appropriated by a particular religious entity. A just cause is one that is fought in unison with the international community. The survival of Islam, as indeed of any other religion, therefore is irrevocably linked with the larger world problem — that of peace and disarmament. Yet, the part which the Muslims can play in determining the course of events is small, and depends on the extent to which they can participate with other nations, in-

cluding India, for the preservation of peace.

119-10

Herein lies the difficult: the absence of a secular model in what is described as the Muslim world. In years to come, the Palestinian state, with its strong multi-religious character, may provide the perfect answer to the challenges of creating a modern nation-state. Until that happens, the Iran model, fashioned by Ayatollah Khomeini, is the only available model that is worthy of emulation, especially in lands that have no cohesive ideology to sustain them. If adapted to local conditions, the Iranian experimentation, though misunderstood in many circles because of its defiant posture towards the U.S., lends itself to greater acceptance because it rests on a deep sense of pride in national identity, cultural cohesion, civilisational unity and religious solidarity. Today, national identity, combined with sovereignty, is in peril. It needs to be defended now, more than ever before.

Time is running out for the Arab rulers. That is because most of them have allowed their own interests to be jettisoned by the powerful nations, and, in the process, forgotten what they owed to their people. Islam is a powerful force, but its immense creative potential has not been harnessed to create an egalitarian society. The essence of Islam is participatory democracy, but it is this very principle that has been flouted in countries such as Saudi Arabia. Revivalism and fundamentalism have overtaken the currents of reforms and innovation that had swept the Muslim world — from Egypt to Indonesia — in the 19th and 20th centuries.

In short, the problem for the Arab world today is liberating most of its countries from authoritarian rule, safeguarding national interests from the growing menace of U.S. imperialism, delivering Palestine from Zionism and achieving economic, social and intellectual progress throughout its lands. Western political and economic domination has obstructed unity, retarded progress and strengthened Israel, the most serious danger to which the Arab world has been exposed since the Crusades. It is time to wake up to this painful reality.

Turkey blow to war plans, US seeks UN decree

AVLAJEAN YACKLEY AND
NADIM LADKI

Ankara/Baghdad, Feb. 18 (Reuters): US preparations for war with Iraq suffered a new setback today when Turkey dug in its heels in negotiations over its role as a launchpad for an invasion.

Washington, embroiled in a broader diplomatic battle at the UN over its war plans, indicated it had issued Ankara with an ultimatum and would do without it if necessary.

The White House also said it might propose a new UN resolution this week or next to try to break a deadlock at the Security Council over its stance that Iraq is hiding weapons of mass destruction and may need to be disarmed by force soon.

Washington has said it is prepared to go ahead with military action without a resolution, but would rather have one. Close ally Saudi Arabia warned it that by passing the UN would make military action look like a "war of aggression".

If Ankara continues to drag its feet, US military planners could go ahead without a northern front. But an assault on Iraq from Turkey would relieve a main invasion from the south and could shorten any war and reduce American casualties.

The *New York Times* said senior Bush officials were for the first time openly discussing what could go wrong both during an attack on Iraq and in the aftermath, including concerns that Baghdad could use human shields or explode oil fields.

Iraq's fractious Opposition groups, some of whom have battled one another in the past, began a gathering in the northern Kurdish enclave to try to form a united front and claim a role in government if President Saddam Hussein is ousted.

In the latest sign of Baghdad increasing cooperation to try to avert war, UN weapons inspectors confirmed that a U-2 surveillance plane had flown its first mission over Iraq.

Iraq agreed allow to the U-2 and other overflights last week under intense pressure. It also agreed to allow private interviews with its scientists, although the inspectors said today new problems had arisen when many of the scientists insisted their statements must be recorded.

Iraqi concessions have deepened misgivings about military action among some European nations and made it more difficult for the US to win international backing for war.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said the standoff with Turkey, which is demanding twice the \$26 billion in economic aid offered by Washington to cushion its economy from the effects of a war, would end "one way or another rather soon".

"We continue to work with Turkey as a friend. But it is decision time," Fleischer said in Washington.

Turkish foreign minister Yasar Yakis said his government would ask parliament to open military facilities to US soldiers only when Washington met Turkish demands.

"When conditions are fulfilled we are prepared to present it in the shortest possible time," Yakis said.

Amid a huge US and British build-up towards some 250,000 troops in the Gulf by early March for possible war against Iraq, the EU has been bitterly divided for a month, trading barbs and issuing rival statements and open letters.

EU leaders said an emergency summit today had helped them put their divisions behind them, but a new row broke out over a demand by French President Jacques Chirac for east European EU hopefuls to mute their backing for US policy.

Aircraft taking part in US-British patrols over "no-fly" zones in Iraq made their seventh strike in 10 days overnight.

Baghdad made a fresh attempt to avert an invasion by calling for an Arab boycott against the US.

"Arab countries must take the necessary measures to protect their dignity using the vast resources of this region, starting with oil, the world's lifeblood, and the ports and air-ports of the region which are vital for global trade," Iraqi foreign minister Najji Sabri told the Saudi-owned daily *Ashraq al-Awsat*. Arab nations have shown no sign of being prepared to take such steps, although they have voiced opposition to a conflict.

Hero Ueki, spokesman for the inspectors, today confirmed an Iraqi foreign ministry statement announcing the first U-2 overflight and indicated more flights were set soon.

1912

Israel recalls Belgium envoy over Sharon case

REUTERS
JERUSALEM, FEBRUARY 12

ISRAEL will recall its ambassador from Belgium in protest at a Brussels court ruling reviving a genocide lawsuit against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Israeli diplomatic sources said on Wednesday.

Belgium's Supreme Appeals Court ruled that the suit pressed by survivors of a 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon by Israeli-backed militia-men could proceed once Sharon leaves office as Prime Minister and loses immunity, the plaintiffs' lawyer said.

In response, Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to recall Israel's Ambassador to Brussels Yehuda Keinar for consultations, a senior Israeli source said. Netanyahu will also summon Belgium's Ambassador in Israel to



Israeli PM Ariel Sharon with Defense Forces chief Moshe Yaalon in Israel on Wednesday. AP/PTI

Israel will respond to it very severely," Netanyahu said in a statement.

Sharon was Defence Minister at the time of the massacre after an Israeli invasion of Lebanon to combat Palestinian guerrillas. In 1983, an Israeli Commission found him indirectly responsible for the massacre. He had to resign as Defence Minister but was never prosecuted.

The plaintiffs had appealed against a lower court ruling last June that Sharon could not be prosecuted for the massacre by Israeli-backed Christian militiamen in the Sabra and Shatila camps because he was not in Belgium.

"This is a victory for international justice and for the victims," Luc Walley, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said. "I think that once the investigation proceeds, then sooner or later it's going to catch up with Sharon," said Chibli

Mallat, Walley's legal partner. "He is the central character in the Sabra and Shatila massacres."

Daniel Shek, the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Director of European Affairs, said: "No nation can unilaterally take the initiative to appoint itself the world wide judge of crimes."

The plaintiffs are using a Belgian human rights law which claims universal jurisdiction allowing the country's courts to try crimes against humanity and genocide, no matter where they were committed. The lower court's ruling had thrown into doubt the power of the courts to try foreigners not present in Belgium. The Senate has since voted to reform the law to make it easier to prosecute people living outside the country for grave human rights abuses, but giving public prosecutors more discretion to prevent so-called propaganda cases.

Intense wrangling to end Nato crisis

Agence France Presse

BRUSSELS, Feb. 12. - Nato pressed ahead today with intense diplomatic wrangling to resolve a crisis over planning for an Iraq war, although a new compromise proposal failed to bring any immediate progress.

As the high-stakes crisis dragged into its third day, Nato chief Mr George Robertson tabled the new proposal in a bid to overcome opposition from Belgium, France and Germany to approving military backing for Turkey.

"The allies are all working very hard to find a solution to what is a serious issue," said spokesman Mr Yves Brodeur after the latest meeting of Nato's policy-making North Atlantic Council broke up without result. The NAC was expected to meet again later.

Powell wields stick: In an apparent carrot-and-stick policy towards its reluctant European 'allies', US secretary of state Mr Colin Powell has warned that the failure to address the Iraq crisis could lead to the break up of Nato, while claiming that any use of force against Iraq (that his country is pushing for) would be "in a most measured way", adds agencies from Washington.

French proposal: To coun-



Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, an envoy of Pope John Paul II, meets Iraqi Vice-President Mr Taha Yassin Ramadan in Baghdad on Wednesday. — AFP

ter a possible US resolution finding Iraq in further material breach of Security Council decisions, France has proposed doubling or tripling the number of arms inspectors, strengthening aerial surveillance and creating a new Intelligence unit to coordinate information on Baghdad, a report from the UNHQ says.

Blair dilemma: Mr Tony Blair's suggestion last week that he is "risking everything" over Iraq looks less like hyperbole now, a report from London says. The Prime Minister may soon

have to make a choice that could put him at odds with his party and country, leaving himself perilously exposed.

The calculation yesterday of party whips was that while Labour MPs will back a conflict that has the express authority of the UN, they will not support it in any other circumstances.

Diplomat expelled: The Philippine government today told an Iraqi Consul, Husham Husain allegedly linked to the Muslim extremist Abu Syyaf group to leave the country within 48 hours, adds a report from Manila.

13 FEB 2003

THE STATESMAN

Problem surmountable: Turkey

By Atul Aneja

12/2
MANAMA, FEB. 11. The shock waves generated by the rift within the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation over plans to protect Turkey from a possible attack by Iraq has begun to affect Iraq's neighbourhood.

The decision of Germany, France and Belgium to block a proposal by the United States to plan for a NATO protective shield for Turkey, a partner of the alliance, to counter a possible Iraqi attack with unconventional weapons has begun to generate a serious internal debate in Ankara, which the official reaction to the event does not reflect.

The Foreign Minister, Yasar Yakis, said, "They (Germany, France and Belgium) did not vote to the protection of Turkey. These countries have problems with the timing," he said, adding that the "problem can be overcome because there is no disagreement on principle."

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But a section of the Turkish intelligentsia has begun to read in the Franco-German decision an indication that Turkey's destiny will be tied with the United States rather than the Europeans.

Diplomatic sources here said that differences over Iraq were shaking the foundations on which the post-World War II international order had been constructed, as there was now a strong possibility that the rift visible within NATO would also be reflected in the U.N. Security Council that meets on Friday to discuss the report the Chief U.N. weapons inspector, Hans Blix, would present.

Sections of the Arab world that stand staunchly opposed to a war in Iraq have however lauded France and Germany. "Whether or not it succeeds in convincing the U.S. to abandon the use of force, France will be perceived as a country that has defended the UN Charter till the end," said the Yemeni Foreign

Minister, Abu Bakr Abdullah Al Kurbi.

The Egyptian weekly Al Usbu has praised France for standing to what it describes as the U.S. 'diktat'.

Quite expectedly, the Iraqi Opposition leaders in exile as well as the pro-U.S. Kurdish groups have blasted France and Germany for their effort to stall a war on Iraq.

"I cannot understand their position," said Ahmad Barmani, a representative of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

"They want to let Saddam stay in power. Unfortunately the position of some of the European countries gives the impression to the Iraqi people that these countries are trying to prevent Saddam from being overthrown."

Ahmad Chalabi, who heads the U.S.-backed Iraqi National Congress, has also lashed out at Germany and France.

Israeli PM holds secret talks with top Palestine official

Sharon called to form govt

JEFFREY HELLER

11.3 10/2
✓ Arafat (w)

Jerusalem, Feb. 9 (Reuters): Prime Minister Ariel Sharon officially accepted today the task of forming Israel's next government after a sweeping election victory fuelled by support for his tough response to a Palestinian uprising for statehood.

Sharon said the new government would have to remove what he called the Palestinian "terrorist leadership", but stopped short of threatening to expel Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

The comments came as news emerged of secret truce talks between Sharon, leader of the right-wing Likud Party, and Ahmed Korei, a top Palestinian official close to Arafat.

The two met on Wednesday for the first high-level talks in nearly a year. A source in Sharon's office said Washington, which has appealed for calm in Israeli-Palestinian violence as it prepares for possible war on

Iraq, encouraged the meeting.

"The plan has been to encourage the Palestinians to act energetically and with determination to stop terror," Dov Weisglass, head of Sharon's office, told Israel Radio, outlining the Prime Minister's proposal to Korei.

"It proposes that everywhere they succeed in preventing attacks or showing that they are making serious efforts to do so, Israel will react accordingly by changing its military deployment in the area and easing restrictions on trade and movement," he added.

Such deals have collapsed in the past, and Israeli forces reoccupied most of the West Bank in the middle of last year following suicide attacks in Israel. The Palestinian Authority has said the incursions have paralysed its security forces.

"Out of a sense of deep responsibility, I accept the task of setting up a new government in Israel," Sharon said in a broad-

cast ceremony after President Moshe Katzav asked him to put together a ruling coalition in the next 42 days.

"The new government will have to complete the campaign against terror, remove the terrorist leadership and create the conditions for the emergence of a new Palestinian leadership with which it will be possible to make real peace," he said.

Sharon has accused Arafat of funding and leading a "coalition of terror" in the Palestinian uprising for statehood, but Arafat has denied fomenting anti-Israeli violence.

"This reflects the true intention of the current Israeli leadership of continuing the path of destruction and escalation," Palestinian Cabinet minister Saeb Erekat said in response to Sharon's comments.

Before the Israeli presidential ceremony, three Palestinians blew up their explosives-laden car next to a Gaza Strip army post, killing themselves

and wounding four soldiers.

Political commentators predicted that Sharon, a 74-year-old former general, would not rush into a coalition, but would await conflict in the Gulf that could draw Iraqi missile attacks on Israel and bolster his call for a broad government.

Likud won one-third of Parliament's 120 seats in last month's poll and could form a narrow coalition with a combination of right-wing, religious and secular parties.

But Sharon has his sights on a so-called unity government that would include his main rival, the centre-left Labour Party that quit his coalition three months ago in a dispute over funding for Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"No one can escape the obligation to give up on immediate political petty interests in favour of national interest," Sharon said in remarks directed at Labour.

10 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Turkey refuses to fight Saddam

Ankara/Baghdad/UN,
February 6

TURKEY ON Thursday announced it would not fight in a US-led war against Iraq. However, the country's parliament allowed the United States to begin renovating military bases and ports for a possible Iraq war, a first step toward opening the way for US combat troops.

The vote came after Prime Minister Abdullah Gul, who has been facing intense US pressure, said Turkey had no choice but to

back Washington in an Iraq war. The vote was 308-193 with nine abstentions.

Gul on Thursday announced that Turkish armed forces would not fight, and that his country would work towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis. The birth of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq could rekindle a separatist rebellion by Turkey's own Kurds.

Earlier, Gul had said his government was holding off on authorising US troops in the country because "we

still believe there is a possibility for peace and we are still working for peace".

But Gul said in remarks published in several newspapers Thursday that Turkey has to take into account its strategic interests and cannot be left out of the process of building a post-Saddam Iraq.

"We have to act together with our strategic partner and ally the United States for our national interests," the *Milliyet* newspaper quoted Gul as saying.

It also reported that Iraqi

Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan paid a secret visit to Ankara during which Gul tried to convince Iraq to disarm. Gul confirmed that the two met in secret talks.

Turkey fears that a war in Iraq could reverse its fragile economic recovery, but has agreed with the United States on a package that would cushion the country from the effects of war. The package would range between \$4 billion and \$15 billion, depending on the length and impact of the war.

USA Today/Agencies

7 FEB 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Brutality is thy name

ARIEL Sharon's near indistinguishable line between security and peace began, perhaps, during his childhood, under the fear of Arab harassment. At nine, Arik would stand on the kitchen stool and read to his mother terrible news reports of people being killed. Decades later he admitted to have grown with security problems. "I remember that we were always surrounded. There was a feeling of danger, but no fear. As a boy I had this feeling that even if the worst were to happen, when it got to the line of the barns, it would stop."

The only son of Russian immigrants, he enlisted in 1942 for Haganah, an underground Jewish organisation, at 14. Haganah later became the Israel Defence Forces. The boy from Kafar Malal commanded an infantry company during the 1948 War of Independence. He was shot in the abdomen during the Battle of Latrun and almost died. But that was not to be, for he was to become the Intelligence Officer and commander of elite IDF units. He married in 1953, two years after he resigned to remain a reservist. For the next two years he studied general history and West-Asian subjects at Hebrew University. He was given his first major assignment at 25 - to build Unit 101, a commando force drafted specially for retaliatory strikes against the Arabs.

Sharon led a mission into Jordan, when Arab terrorists infiltrated into Israel. He marched into Kibya town and blew up 45 houses, killing 69 Arabs. He admitted it was a tragedy but made it clear that every act of Arab terrorism would have to pay a heavy price. This is one lesson that he has repeatedly wanted to teach, and which has been the cause of friction with his superiors. In 1957, Moshe Dayan, then chief of staff and later Israeli statesman, sent him to a training programme at the Camberley Staff College in UK. During the next four years, he served as Infantry Brigade Commander, then as Infantry School Commander. That was the time when he lost his wife in a car accident and completed his law degree from Tel-Aviv University. He was soon to marry his sister-in-law. During the Six-Day War in 1967, he, as a general, commanded an armoured division.

He led his forces through the Sinai front and reached the Suez Canal in three days. In the '70s, he was Southern Israel's security chief, a role best described by David Plotz in the online journal, *State*. "(Then) he suppressed Palestinian resistance in Gaza with amazing brutality and effectiveness. Sharon bulldozed Palestinian houses, summarily murdered dozens of purported terrorists (without the pretence of judicial process), and stopped youth demonstrations by exiling parents of demonstrators."

He resigned from the Army in June 1972 to plunge into politics by joining the Liberal Party, and took the lead to bring together Right wing parties in the Knesset. His efforts finally took shape as the Likud Party.

In 1973 he was recalled to the military for the Yom Kippur War where he repeated his daring 1967 Sinai operations - arguably last century's most brilliant battles. The same year he lost his 10-year-old son.



STANLEY THEODORE profiles Ariel Sharon, who has just won a landslide election in Israel, proving violence pays, and pays well, in today's world

Several years later Sharon said he could never forget the helplessness he felt while holding his dying son. His other son Omri became, in Sharon's words, an extraordinary and softening influence on him. Incidentally he was in the eye of the corruption scandal that broke out during the election campaign.

After the 1977 polls Sharon returned to politics to become minister for agriculture in Menachem Begin's government. Why did he choose politics? "I saw all of the horror of the war. Therefore, I believe that I understand the importance of peace... For me, peace should provide security." That gives an indication of his violent action plan to contain the intifada.

As chairman of the ministerial committee for settlements, Sharon encouraged the Jews to settle in the Occupied Territories - an issue that raged Arab-Jewish negotiations for the next quarter century. With single-minded passion he built the West Bank settlements - for any Jew from anywhere who decided to make Israel his home. He was dubbed the 'Bulldozer' or 'Arik, King of the Jews'. He then began opposing Arab sovereignty in the Occupied Territories.

In 1982, as minister for defence, he spearheaded the Lebanon War against the PLO, which was

launching deadly attacks on Israelis. Sharon led his forces right into Beirut, pushing Arafat and his men into the sea. Known as Sharon's War, it again showed his excesses. After Arafat left, his troops allowed the Lebanese Christian Phalangist militia to enter two Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatilla, where in two days about 800 refugees were slaughtered. The world was horrified. Prime Minister Begin was clueless. Unofficially, the toll was three to four times higher. An inquiry held Sharon "indirectly responsible". Sharon the hero was Sharon the villain, perhaps next only to Adolf Hitler. But Israel's occupation of Southern Lebanon was disastrous, prompting the suppressed Palestinians to begin what today is known as suicide terrorism. It also was the first time when Israel conceded territory.

That would have been enough to end any other politician's career. But Sharon had become indispensable to the Likud coalition. The void created by the death of many of his political peers, such as Dayan, Begin and Yitzhak Rabin catapulted him to prominence.

In 1996 Benjamin Netanyahu assumed power. Sharon was his foreign minister. Politically the ghost of Sabra-Shatilla was exorcised. Netanyahu lost in 1999 and Sharon became the Opposition leader. Ehud Barak's peace agreement drafted with Bill Clinton fell apart despite the most concessions Israelis ever proposed to the Palestinians, including Jerusalem. For Sharon this was a sell-out. Then he did the extraordinary. On 28 September 2001 he, with 1,000 armed guards, visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, held most sacred by Jews, Arabs and Christians. That demonstrated Jews could worship there without restrictions and they had sovereign control over the land. For Jews this was a sign of triumph, for Palestinians extreme provocation.

The Palestinian intifada began afresh. In April 2002 a suicide bomber killed 23. The post-9/11 world was shocked. Sharon unleashed 'Operation Defensive Shield', eliminating the Palestinians accused of terrorist acts and forced almost an entire population indoors. He confined Arafat to his Ramallah headquarters, bombed it, ignoring the pleas of world leaders and stopped water and power supply to the building. At one stage Arafat was operating out of just one room, with tanks and Israeli forces lining the dilapidated compound wall.

In March 2001 the barrel-framed leader did what no other politician would even think of - he referred to the blackest spot of his career. He said his biggest regret was not having killed Arafat when he had the chance during the 1972 Beirut invasion. But then no leader ever lived like Sharon - holding his life and convictions in the hollow of his palm. It's a long way for Sharon to realise his dream of seeing a normal day in Israel for his 6 million people, now that he literally bulldozed a mandate that bested all predictions.

(The author is Hyderabad-based special representative of The Statesman.)

/netnews/ Total posters

Rs 1,000 plus for a poster seems a bit too heavy, but the fact is the stuff is good. The cricket section is broken down into different parts - county championships, the World Cup, hall of fame, etc. It has 275 posters in all its sections put together.

www.totalposter.com/index.jsp gives the option of buying any poster under different sizes. A better option is at www.santabanta.com/wallpapers/parent.asp?catid=12 where 12 major cricket stars are featured. You can download a picture and send it set it as wallpaper and even mail it as an e-card. An additional feature: there are downloads for several other categories of celebrities: Anna Kournikova, Britney Spears, Cindy Crawford, Carmen Electra, Brad Pitt, Ricky Martin and Tom Cruise among several others including our own Bollywood stars.

Players' profiles

This is an excellent site having brief profiles of top cricketers from 11 countries. The site gives small details like the date of birth and the player's batting and bowling styles. It gives the Test and ODI statistics for that player in a column format. The site also serves some things that miss our attention, like the name of the world's best fielders full name - Jonathan Neil Rhodes. The rest of the site too is done up well offering up to date news, apart from a column on opinion and a chat zone. There is a link covering individual teams as well. It's all there at www.crickzone.com/player/.

If you have interesting insights into the Net, or have discovered a great new site, e-mail the details to thestatesman@vsnl.com

H. Azim (W)

ISRAEL BACKS SHARON

W-10 9/2

THE VICTORY OF Israel's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and his Likud party in the parliamentary elections that were recently held in that country comes as no surprise since their fortunes have been on the ascendant ever since the *intifada* (the Palestinian uprising) broke out in September 2000. Neither is it difficult to predict that the triumph of the Israeli Right will ensure the prolongation of the violent confrontation that has continued unabated since then and has claimed thousands of Palestinian lives and caused hundreds of deaths on the Israeli side. It is possible to quibble that the Likud's performance in the election cannot be really termed a victory since the party won only 37 of the 120 seats in the Knesset and is thus clearly short of a majority of its own. However, the more important fact is that through this performance the Likud has won twice the number of seats it held in the previous Knesset and is clearly the party that will form the next Government and shape its policies. The real scale of the Likud's victory can be gauged from the fact that the Labour party — which was once the dominant force in Israeli politics and which, till this election, had always managed to get as many if not more seats than the Likud — has been left far behind having lost six of the 25 seats it held in the outgoing House. While the rest of the result has followed the usual pattern with the remainder of the seats having gone for the most part to a plethora of small parties, each of which has a single digit representation, the balance of power could be held by two other parties — Shinui and Shas — which have won 15 and 11 seats respectively.

While the Shinui is a staunchly secular party backed largely by Jews of European origin, the Shas represents religiously observant Jews who had originally migrated from Asia and North Africa. They do, however, share the conviction that the Palestinians must wind up the *intifada* before

Israel resumes negotiations with them. Since the other parties of the Israeli Right also support this basic position, Mr. Sharon, the foremost proponent of this point of view, should face no difficulty in eliciting their support to form a Government. But Mr. Sharon does not want to continue as Prime Minister with the backing solely of the right-wing parties mainly because it would create complications for Israel's dealings with the world outside. Ideally, Mr. Sharon would like Labour, which is widely identified as the party that has no qualms about negotiating with the Palestinians, to join his Government. Labour's current leader, Amram Mitzna, has rejected Mr. Sharon's proposal that they join a national unity government but the party could reverse its stand once the expected change in its leadership takes place.

The strangest aspect of Israel's politics is that opinion polls still show that a majority do approve of the policy which Mr. Mitzna had promised to implement in respect of the Palestinians if he was chosen Prime Minister — including a withdrawal from the occupied territories and a dismantling of the Jewish settlements. But, as the election results have further proved, just as large a majority believes that Mr. Mitzna and his party cannot deal firmly enough with the Palestinians. With the issue of personal security being uppermost, a majority of Israeli voters have opted for the man who has met, and promises to meet, violence with violence even though developments have amply proved that Mr. Sharon's methods have achieved neither peace nor security. With the threat of war looming over an adjacent part of West Asia, not much notice has been taken of the unfolding situation on the Palestinian-Israeli front. But the world will be reminded, sooner or later, that the confrontation between the Israelis and the Palestinians does lie at the root of almost every other problem in West Asia.

Israeli verdict

51-8 Sharon can turn right, or left 312

Ariel Sharon may have reason to be pleased at Likud's decisive election victory over Labour, but it does not make him master yet. Although Likud has the highest number of seats in the Knesset, the count is only 37 out of a total of 120, which means it will need a number of coalition partners to form a government, as before. It is not at all clear who they are going to be. He can ally with a ragtag bunch of religious parties, the largest being Shas with 11 seats, but that is like trying to form a government in Pakistan with constituents of the religiously orthodox Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal as key coalition partners. Fundamentalists, ex hypothesi, tend to be rigid and fixated and do not allow room for political manoeuvre and Sharon knows he will need a lot of that. Sharon should favour a coalition with Labour and also Shinui that has performed well with 15 seats. The problem with that is Labour is frustrated at having to carry the can for Sharon's hawkish policies with respect to the Palestinians, which is why they brought down the government in the first place. With Labour's share of seats having fallen to 19 from 25, it wields even less influence now.

Shinui is a secular party which appeals to the growing Israeli middle class. It is determined to have no truck with the religious parties, therefore it may opt out following Labour. The most probable scenario, therefore, is the worst-case one, with Sharon ensconced in power supported by the religious right. That would scuttle hopes for peace unless the Americans do something drastic which, on present form, is unlikely. Sharon's best bet may be to woo Labour back by promising to moderate his policies, as the approach he has been following of entering the occupied territories, keeping the Palestinians bottled up, has not forced Arafat to flee or reduced his support. Even courting Labour may look like going against the verdict of the electorate, which has in general favoured the hawks over the doves. But that, after all, is what leadership is all about.

3 FEB 2003

THE STATESMAN

Sharon's Encore

Tel Aviv appears to have outdone mentor Washington in its swing to extreme and rigid right wing politics with the Likud party racing to a smashing victory in the recent elections. The war drums from the Bush administration found ready echo in Israel as Ariel Sharon's 'in your face' diplomacy vis-a-vis the Palestinians found endorsement with the electorate. The Labour party which could have been a counterweight to the aggression of Mr Sharon crumbled to its worst ever defeat sliding from 25 to 19 seats. So what will Mr Sharon do now that he has got his party 37 seats in the 120-member Knesset, up from the earlier 19? Like Mr Bush, Mr Sharon is not likely to be magnanimous now that he has got the upper hand. Though promising 'painful concessions' for peace, his party is egging him on to expel Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat from the Gaza, expand Jewish settlements and tighten the already harsh restrictions on the three million Palestinians in the autonomous and occupied territories. The bottomline — prevent the creation of a Palestinian state at all cost.

For a fearful West Asia bracing for Washington's military strike against Baghdad, the Likud victory is unsettling. All the region's Arab regimes believe firmly that Mr Bush's objective is not just to unseat Saddam Hussein and secure Iraq's vast oilfields, but also to strengthen its key ally Tel Aviv. Despite his country's vulnerability, Mr Sharon has readily fallen in with Washington's plans and has begun preparations for the war in right earnest. Among the measures being taken are constructing bomb shelters and upgrading gas mask kits. As a key ally in the region, a wiser leader might have cautioned Mr Bush against any hasty aggression without exhausting all possible peaceful options. But restraint has never figured in Mr Sharon's lexicon. Far back in the fifties, as an army officer, he wrote that his goal "was to create in the Arabs a psychology of defeat, to beat them every time and to beat them so decisively that they would develop the conviction that they would never win." Mr Sharon has been proved disastrously wrong; the greater the aggression he has unleashed, the more his country has come under threat from suicide bombers and snipers. His contribution to the 'jihadisation' of an essentially secular and progressive Palestinian society holds many lessons for the Bush administration. Military might alone cannot secure what Yasser Arafat calls the 'peace of the brave'.

Sharon shines in 'pyrrhic' victory

Eric Silver in Jerusalem

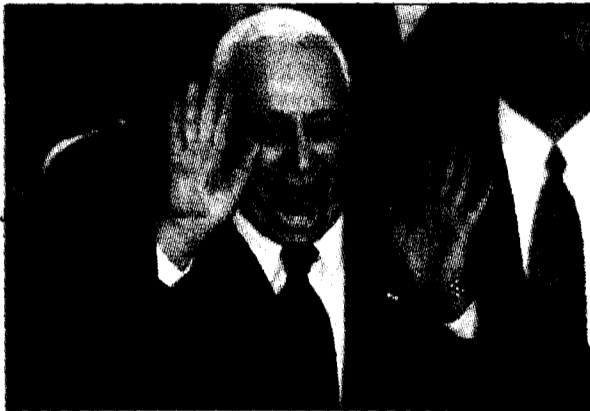
Jan. 29. — Israelis gave Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon a massive vote of confidence in Tuesday's general elections, but the Likud leader is expected to have a hard job building the broad-based coalition government. Critics were already calling it a pyrrhic victory.

With only the soldiers' and diplomats' votes to be counted, Likud won 37 seats, Labour 19, Tommy Lapid's secularist Shinui 15, the Sephardi Orthodox Shas 11, the liberal left Meretz six, the far-right National Union seven, the National Religious Party and United Torah Judaism five each, One Nation (led by Histadrut trade union chief Mr Amir Peretz) four, Natan Sharansky's Yisrael B'aliyah two and the three Arab parties a total of nine.

After being battered by 28 months of intifada, Israelis swung in unprecedented numbers to the right and delivered a devastating blow to the left, which failed to convince them that negotiations with Yasser Arafat could bring peace. Mr Sharon urged "all the Zionist parties" to join a national unity government based on the same

guidelines as the one which collapsed three months ago.

But Labour's defeated leader, Mr Amram Mitzna, stood by his campaign pledge not to serve as a junior partner in a Likud-led coalition. "We will not act as a fig leaf for Sharon's failed policies," he insisted. "I will not



Mr Sharon waves at his supporters on Wednesday in Tel Aviv. — AFP

give up our chosen path for a ministerial position."

Mr Sharon has six weeks to form a government. He could put together a coalition of right-wing and religious parties, commanding a comfortable parliamentary majority. If Tuesday night's victory celebration is any guide, many in the Likud would welcome it. That is not, however, the government Mr Sharon aspires to head. He doesn't

want to be perceived as leader of an extremist regime, especially when Israel is seeking an extra \$12 billion in emergency US aid (\$4 billion as a grant, \$8 billion in loan guarantees) to bail out its stricken economy.

Mr Sharon's prospects of avoiding a narrow coalition hinge on Shinui, this week's other big winner. Mr Lapid will not make it easy for him. He said he still prefers a "secular coalition" with Likud and Labour and refuses to serve alongside strictly Orthodox parties.

Mr Ephraim Sneh, who served as transport minister in Mr Sharon's last unity government, explained: "We have to face reality. We wouldn't be strong enough to force the coalition to adopt our path. To sit in the government without influence is pointless."

Colette Avital, who was re-elected to the Labour benches, said: "People left us because there have been so many elections within the party."

The big losers were Meretz, which dropped from 10 seats to six, and Yisrael B'aliyah, from six to two. The veteran Meretz leader, Yossi Sarid, announced that he was resigning. An official of the Russian immigrant party hinted that Mr Sharansky will follow suit.

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10-19 W 182 (2)

Iraq for private interviews of its scientists

By Atul Aneja

JERUSALEM, JAN. 20. Faced with a virtual ultimatum from the United States on Sunday that insufficient cooperation with weapons inspections could trigger war, Iraq today said it would encourage its scientists to be interviewed by United Nations officials privately. "Persons asked for interviews in private will be encouraged to accept," the presidential adviser, Amir al-Saadi, told reporters at the end of two days of talks with the chief inspectors, Hans Blix and Mohammad ElBaradei.

Iraq also promised more help to the U.N. weapons experts and said it was even forming its own teams of inspectors to search for banned weapons. The decision marks a significant softening of its stance as all interviews conducted by the U.N. inspectors have been, so far, held in the presence of Iraqi officials. Reports in the Turkish media suggest that the U.N. has listed 16 names of Iraqi scientists for interviews, but has been unable to contact them so far. There are suspicions that these scientists may have been already funnelled, or are in the process of being sent abroad.

Consequently, the list of these scientists has been passed to Jordan, Turkey and Kuwait. A joint statement that was read

out by Mr. Al-Saadi in the presence of Mr. Blix and Mr. ElBaradei said that Iraq would supplement a list of around 500 scientists involved in its past banned weapons programmes. According to the statement, Iraq had handed more documents to inspectors, was clarifying others and was forming its own teams to search for suspicious items. The U.N. inspectors discovered empty chemical warheads last week, which Iraq had failed to report to the U.N.

The statement said Iraq would also encourage inspections of "private sites" — an apparent reference to places like the homes of leading scientists — and "private interviews." However, there was no mention in the statement of taking scientists outside Iraq for interviews, as Washington has demanded on the grounds that the interviewees need protection from reprisals. Mr. Blix on his part said he was "fairly confident" that Iraq would honour its pledges. "We have solved a number of practical issues, not all," he told the news conference.

Iraq's interaction with Mr. Blix and Mr. ElBaradei is likely to strongly influence a decision on a U.S.-led war against Iraq. The report of the U.N. inspections team to the U.N. Security Council on January 27, which



FLICKERING HOPE: An artist lights a candle during a demonstration in Baghdad on Monday. Iraqi artists rallied in support of their President, Saddam Hussein, amid growing U.S war threats against Iraq. — AP

the two lead inspectors will influence, is likely to set in motion a chain of events that could culminate in a war. Meanwhile, the

Iran and Saudi Arabia have agreed to participate in a summit in Ankara—most likely on Thursday — where heads from Jordan, Egypt and Syria have also been invited. Syria is also keen to host a preparatory meeting of Foreign Ministers of these countries prior to the Ankara summit. Out of Iraq's neighbours, Turkey and Jordan have some leverage on influencing the timing of the war. Without their cooperation, the U.S. troops cannot open a northern and western front in Iraq and will have to depend only on Kuwait as staging post for launching an attack from the South. Thousands of protesters, many of whom are supporters of the Turkey's newly elected Justice and Development Party, held anti-war demonstrations which coincided with the visit to Turkey by the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Richard B. Myers, on Sunday.

Realising that conflict can be averted only if the Iraqi President agrees to go into exile, the search for a suitable location for this purpose appears to have gathered momentum. Libya is a possible destination, and, it is not surprising, that the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, and the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister, Tariq Aziz, were reportedly in Tripoli during the weekend.

Sharon rejects 'irrelevant' mediators

59-3 M
H. B. B. (2)

Stephen Farrell
The Times, London

LONDON, Jan. 20. — Mr Ariel Sharon caused a diplomatic storm yesterday by dismissing as "irrelevant" the quartet of international mediators working to create a Palestinian state.

Speaking in Jerusalem yesterday night, he made it clear that of the group's four members, the USA, UN, Russia, and European Union, only Washington has any real significance for him.

Asked by Newsweek magazine what he thought of the quartet's "peace plan" to implement President George Bush's vision of a Palestinian state by 2005, which calls on Israel and the Palestinians to make simultaneous concessions, Mr Sharon said: "Oh, the quartet is nothing. Don't take it seriously."

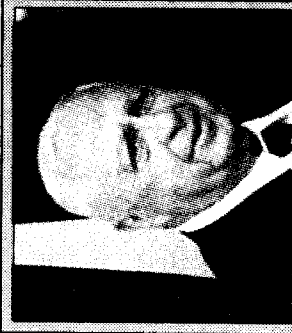
Mr Sharon then outlined his own proposal, which differs significantly from the quartet's by making Palestinian reform a precondition, instead of both sides taking parallel steps. "First, Mr Yasser Arafat should be removed from an influential posi-

the UN — and to some extent Russia — did not accept Israel's view.

He said that while he "deeply appreciated" efforts by Tony Blair and other European leaders, their involvement was unwelcome until they adopt what Israel regards as a more balanced attitude toward the Palestinians. "Once it is balanced, you are mostly welcome to take part."

A diplomat close to the quartet's discussions last night (Sunday) reacted angrily to Mr Sharon's remarks, saying it appeared to be yet another attempt by Israel to stall any moves toward diplomatic progress. He compared it with Mr Sharon's earlier stalling tactics: insisting on seven days of total quiet from the Palestinians before making any reciprocal moves, and insisting that all discussion of the "road map" must wait till after the Israeli elections next Monday.

He said Mr Bush considered the quartet team important enough to have met them last month, and was due to do so again in Washington next month.



'I hope they will be very careful that during the possible war against Iraq, they will not act against Israel'

tion. Secondly, a Prime Minister should be appointed. Third, reforms should be undertaken, mostly in the security organisations," he said.

The Israeli Prime Minister clarified his remarks by saying that whereas Israel saw "eye to eye" with the USA on the interpretation and implementation of Mr Bush's vision, there were differences with other quartet members.

Mr Arafat's status was the main area of dispute, he said. "While the USA agrees that he should be removed, Europe and



The house of a Hamas leader is dynamited by the Israeli Army in the West Bank city of Hebron on Monday. — AFP

Sharon leads again, Opp backs out

DAN WILLIAMS
JERUSALEM, JANUARY 16

PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon has regained his hefty lead in Israel's election race, polls showed on Thursday, after his main rival ruled out rejoining him in a "unity" coalition widely favoured by jittery voters.

Opposition Labour Party leader Amram Mitzna on Tuesday ruled out entering another bloc led by Sharon's right-wing Likud, a move analysts said backfired amid public concern about a continued Palestinian uprising and a possible war over Iraq.

A survey commissioned by the liberal daily *Ha'aretz* saw Likud winning 30 seats in the 120-seat Knesset (Parliament) in the January 28 election, up from 27 predicted in a January 9 poll by the paper after Likud was tainted by a funding scandal.

Mitzna (centre) campaigning at a Tel Aviv shopping mall on Wednesday. *Reuters*



side bomber who last year killed six people in Jerusalem and a Palestinian gunman who shot dead a soldier in a West Bank Army base before being killed. Thirteen of the militants' relatives were left homeless, Palestinian witnesses said.

Israel says its home-demolition policy deters Palestinians from joining militants waging the nearly 28-month-old campaign for independence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, lands Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East War.

But attacks have not ceased and the policy has been condemned as a human rights abuse by world leaders.

Palestinian security officials said Israeli forces also razed three homes on Gaza's tinderbox border with Egypt, where the Army regularly operates to combat arms smuggling.

The Army said it had no

knowledge of such demolitions. In Slav, a Jewish settlement in central Gaza, troops wounded and captured a Palestinian gunman who tried to sneak in, it said.

In the latest international intervention effort, Egypt has been brokering talks among Palestinian factions in Cairo with the aim of securing a truce to enable peace talks to start anew. Faction leaders have been invited for another round of talks next week.

But leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, militant groups who are sworn to Israel's destruction and have carried out many of the major suicide bombings in the last two years, vowed on Thursday there would be no let-up in their operations.

"Our position is unchanged," Hamas official Ismail Haniyah said. "Truces and initiatives should come from Israel and not from the Palestinian and Arab sides." —*Reuters*

Sharon accuses Arafat of meddling in Israel election

Jerusalem, January 12

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon on Sunday dismissed an appeal by Yasser Arafat for a halt to attacks on Israeli civilians, calling it a ploy to boost the chances of Sharon's dovish challenger in January 28 elections.

A Palestinian Cabinet statement on Saturday condemned "all acts of violence that target Palestinian and Israeli civilians" and added: "As the Israeli election date gets closer, we appeal to all our people to practice self-restraint."

Analysts say a pre-election period of calm could increase the vote for Israeli Labor party chief Amram Mitzna, who unlike Sharon wants to reopen talks on a Palestinian state frozen since a Palestinian uprising erupted in September 2000.

Palestinian Authority leaders have openly voiced preference

for Mitzna in the election and Sharon accused Arafat, the Palestinian President, of interfering in the campaign.

"Not only is the murder of Israelis a constant and permanent goal for the head of the Palestinian Authority, it is also a political purpose," he said at the weekly cabinet meeting.

"Killing Israelis way before the elections is fine, but once elections near it is better to stop, only to continue after the elections are held," Sharon added.

Arafat regularly condemns suicide bombings and other attacks on Israeli civilians, and his officials say they cannot control Palestinian militant groups. Sharon's Government insists Arafat is personally responsible for such attacks.

Sharon's statement came amid new Israeli-Palestinian violence that may help him shift public attention back to security

issues from the funding scandal that has eroded his Right-wing Likud party's huge lead in pre-election polls.

3 Palestinians killed

Israeli forces raided the southern Gaza towns of Khan Younis and Beit Hanoun early on Sunday, levelling at least six metalworks and waging battles with militants that left two Palestinian gunmen dead, the army said.

Palestinian witnesses said the two were members of Arafat's police force and up to 30 workshops and stores in Khan Younis were damaged or destroyed.

A Palestinian was shot dead near the West Bank city of Hebron on Sunday when Israeli security guards clashed with gunmen who opened fire on an Israeli oil tanker, army and police officials said.

Reuters

13 JAN 2003

Scam Sharon blackened out

Jerusalem, Jan. 10 (Reuters): Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's scandal-plagued election campaign faced mounting problems today after a news conference in which he denied wrongdoing and assailed his main rival who was yanked off the air.

Israeli media slammed Sharon over yesterday's televised appearance, abruptly cut off in an unprecedented move by a judge overseeing electoral procedure who said the Prime Minister's political comments ran foul of broadcast regulations.

But it was not clear whether the controversy over a \$1.5-million loan from a South Africa-based businessman to one of Sharon's sons would in the long run reduce or rally support for the Right-wing leader in the January 28 election.

The scandal has sharply cut the formidable lead his Likud party has been enjoying in opinion polls over the main Opposition Centre-Left Labour Party, led by Amram Mitzna.

The choice voters make between the Sharon and his challenger could determine the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sharon favours a strong military approach. Mitzna offers an unconditional resumption of peace talks.

Toughening its line against a Palestinian uprising for statehood, the Israeli army shut down three West Bank liaison offices where Palestinian security officers once consulted with their Israeli counterparts.

It called their continued operation pointless.

The closure of the District Coordinating Offices in the cities of Nablus, Tulkarm and Qalqilya left the DCO in Jericho, also in the West Bank, as the only

one still functioning under interim peace deals shattered by the past 27 months of violence.

Israeli forces in Nablus demolished the family home of Darin Abu Eisha, leaving six of her relatives homeless.

Abu Eisha, who blew herself up at an Israeli checkpoint near Jerusalem last February, wounding three policemen, was one of four Palestinian women who have carried out suicide attacks during the revolt.

Israel weighs response to attacks

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JAN. 6. In responding to the twin suicide bombings in Tel Aviv on Sunday, Israel has so far decided to restrain the mainstream Palestinian leadership, without launching retaliatory attacks in the Palestinian territories.

Israeli helicopters on Sunday night did target what was described as a factory in the Gaza Strip that manufactured mortar shells, but observers point out that this attack may not be connected to the Tel Aviv blasts. Twenty-three people were killed and 114 injured in the biggest strike against Israeli civilians in recent months. Not unexpectedly, the Israeli establishment has sought to pin the blame for the attack on the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade that is steered by the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat's Fatah faction.

Israeli sources say that the militant organisation took responsibility for the attack. But Fatah on Monday denied any connection with the attack. Persisting with its effort to link the Palestinian Authority with terrorist attacks, Israel has decided to prevent Palestinian delegates from attending a mid-January international conference on West Asia in London. It has also decided to shut three Islamic academies and imposed curbs on Palestinian vehicular traffic. Besides, it has reserved the right not to transfer money to the Palestinian Authority.



Palestinian men gather belongings from the rubble of a building, attacked by the Israeli army in the Tal-Asultan neighbourhood near Rafah on Monday. — AFP

Predictably, the Palestinian Authority, which has been put on the defensive, has condemned the incident and described it as a "terrorist attack." Anticipating political pressure from Israel, it has sought international intervention so that the Palestinian security forces can take action against the perpetrators of this attack.

Sunday's incident is likely to have repercussions on the up-

coming Israeli election, which is being held later this month. Analysts point out that the latest attack is expected to benefit the right wing Likud party, which is seeking Israeli votes on the promise of enhancing internal security.

The Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon's office condemned the attack, and said Israel had no choice but to fight terrorism with "a fury." But Is-

rael, despite the harsh rhetoric, is unlikely to get into a retaliatory overdrive as there is considerable pressure on it from the United States against launching reprisals.

Washington does not want the Palestinian situation, which has pan-Arab implications, to worsen at this time, as it apprehends that this could divert its attention from developments in Iraq.

THE HINDU

1/7/01

Gas deal with Russia fuels Turkey's E.U. ambitions

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA (BAHRAIN), JAN. 5. Turkey is set to receive Russian natural gas through the world's deepest undersea pipeline on Monday and hopes that this project will help in fulfilling its ambition to integrate with the European Union. The 1250 km. Blue Stream gas pipeline runs nearly 376 km of its length under the Black sea at a depth of 2,100 meters, making it the deepest undersea pipeline in the world.

The pipeline is expected to deliver regular supplies of gas by January 15. Turkey sees the Blue stream pipeline project as part of its ambition to become a regional hub for supplying natural gas to the E.U. Besides Russia, Turkey has also signed

energy deals with Iran, Algeria and Egypt. Turkey is also playing a key role in realising a U.S. backed energy project that will bring oil from Azerbaijan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan.

Two factors are driving Turkey to reach out to the E.U. as a supplier of natural gas. First, Ankara hopes that by becoming a major natural gas supplier, it can acquire a political leverage with the E.U. E.U.'s dependence on Turkey to fulfil its energy demand will provide Ankara a handle to influence its way into the E.U. Turkey appears to have steeled its resolve to become a E.U. member recently, after the Justice and Development Party came to power in the November elections. Not surprisingly, Turkish officials are making no secret of their plans to draw en-

ergy links with the E.U. Turkish officials point out that plans are afoot to sell 500 million cubic meters of gas brought by the Blue Stream pipeline to Greece. Besides, Turkey also hopes to sell gas to Italy. Second, sheer economic is also driving Turkey to supply gas to Europe. Turkey has already scaled down annual procurement from the Blue Stream project from four billion cubic metres to two billion cubic metres.

However, reduced demand can push up costs. Supplies to the European market will have to come into play, as the pipeline by 2008 would be in position to pump 16 billion barrels of gas annually. The Turkey-Russia project is bound to yield economic as well as political benefits to Russia.

THE HINDU

2003

Veiled designs

Driving Saddam Hussein out of Baghdad is not just about oil, it is about transforming the Arab world, says Pramit Pal Chaudhuri

THE CRUDE way to look at the US war against terrorism is to say it is about bashing Muslims. Or that Washington is using 9/11 as a pretext to capture Iraq's oilfields. The assumption: George W Bush has no grand strategy, that beyond Tomahawks and Guantanamo Bay there is no vision.

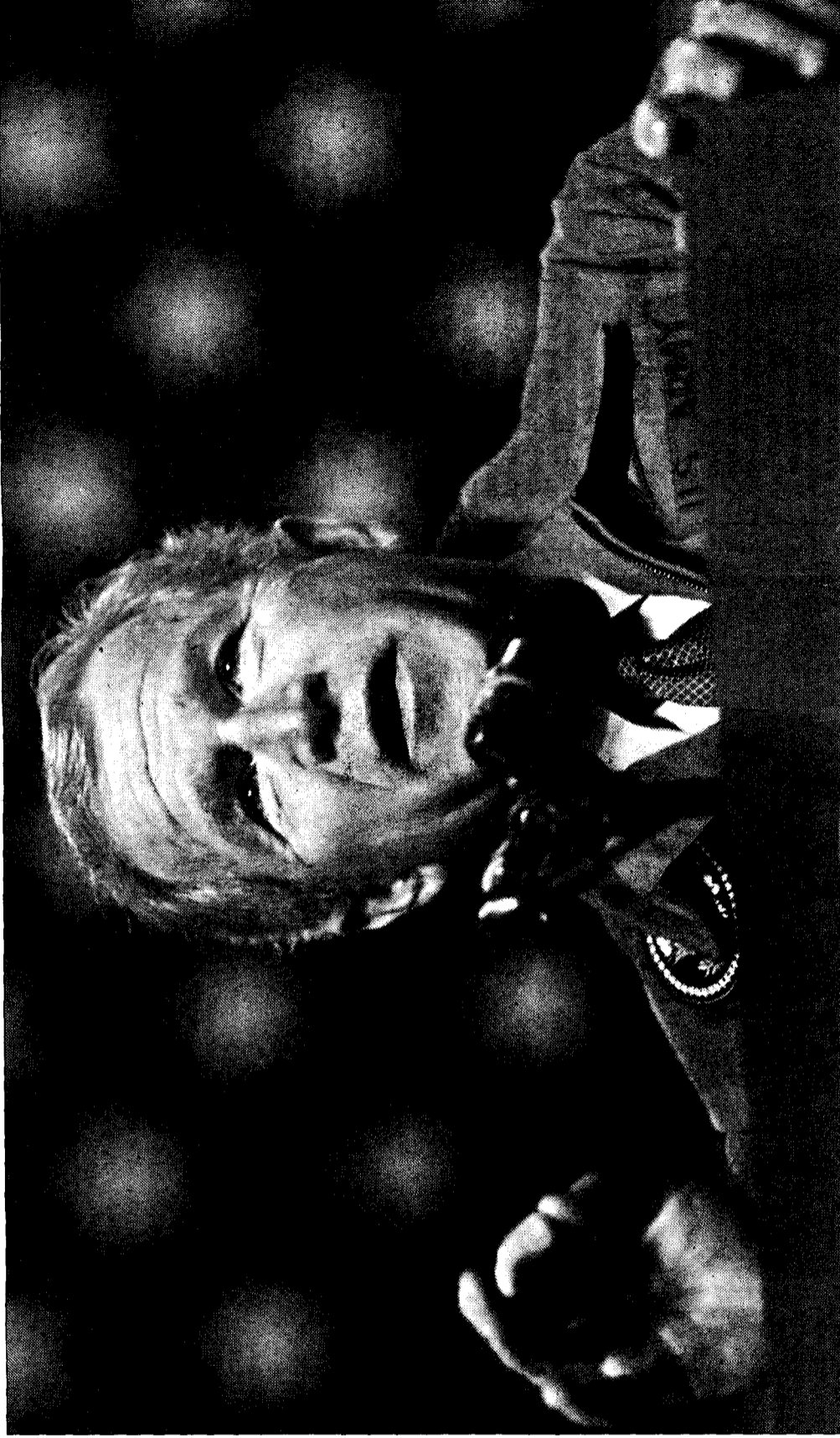
This is important. Great powers which depend only on military power eventually run aground. Other powers coalesce against them. Their public fire of paying the price, in taxes and corpses, of being globocop. The sustainable way to be a global hegemon is to set up a world system enshrining economic and political values which serve the interests of both superpower and potential rivals. The US did it before. Former enemies like Germany, Japan and Russia have become or are trying to become capitalist democracies with US characteristics.

Is there such a liberal vision embedded in the war against terrorism? Most say no. Washington seemed to shirk rebuilding post-Taliban Afghanistan. And it muddied the waters when it grafted the overthrow of Hussein to the campaign against Al Qaeda.

But there are signs of a big picture along the Potomac. John Lewis Gaddis, the dean of US foreign policy scholars, recently took a close look at Bush's National Security Strategy and argued there was a grand strategy inside.

The NSS outlines three strands of a post-9/11 foreign policy. First, defending the peace by "fighting terrorists and tyrants" and doing so with pre-emptive attack. Second, preserving the peace by "building good relations among the great powers". Gaddis argues this meant preventing the formation of an anti-American coalition by associating US power with certain universal principles. Third, the US would "extend the peace" by "promoting free and open societies." As Gaddis points out, this reflects a general consensus among terrorism experts that the cause of Osama bin Laden and his ilk is the closed polity of many Islamic countries. If Muslim Arabs flock to support terrorists it is because the region is a democratic wasteland.

The NSS says it envisions a clash "in-side civilisation, a battle for the future of the Muslim world." Gaddis asks: What if this is about democratising the Arab world? In that case Iraq is the laboratory for an awesome experiment. "We can set in motion a process that could undermine and ultimately remove reactionary regimes elsewhere in the Middle East, thereby eliminating the principal breeding ground for terrorism." He concluded: "If I'm right about this, then it's a truly grand strategy." A fuzzy plan "turns out, upon closer examination, to be a plan for trans-



The current image of George W Bush is that he is a leader without a vision. But a scrutiny of his National Security Strategy reveals the plan for an awesome experiment in Iraq.

forming the entire Muslim Middle East: for bringing it, once and for all, into the modern world."

Gaddis is more or less right. There have always been multiple reasons why Washington wants Saddam Hussein out. The traditional US Persian Gulf policy is derived from Jimmy Carter who declared ensuring the free flow of oil through the Straits of Hormuz a pillar of US national security. This has meant ensuring no local power can rival US influence. So revolutionary Iran had to be contained. Saddam could not be allowed to keep Kuwait or possess nuclear arms. Oil undergirds it all, but the policy as implemented is a classic game of balancing powers.

The claim US is just out to control Iraqi oil does not hold water if one looks at the nature of the world oil market. As industry analysts note, the US interest is long-term oil supply and price stability. Who owns the oilfield is important, but not worth a risky war.

In the end, the next Iraq war is most likely about 9/11. Not because of any Iraq-

terests like oil the US failed to encour-

age democracy in the Arab world. US national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, pointedly said in October: "We reject the condescending view that freedom will not grow in the soil of the Middle East — or that Muslims somehow do not share in the desire to be free."

When Haass visited India he met a cross-section of Indian Muslim leaders because Indian Muslims are the second largest Muslim population in the world and among the poorest. Yet, he said none of them has joined Al Qaeda. "I asked why," Haas said. "And they said we live in a secular democracy, we have alternatives to terrorism."

US officials have hinted they want Iraq to be the lever that will open up the Arab world to the fresh air of democracy. Washington needs a model and Iraq was the perfect choice. It was already in the US's crosshairs for other reasons, had a well-educated secular population and a populace weary of its present ruler. It also had enough oil to fund its own nation-building.

This is Bush's dream scenario: Iraq

becomes, after a period of US rule, a democratic confederation. This tips the balance of power in Iran towards the elected leadership, away from the muscle serves to open up Saudi Arabia.

Of course, what will actually happen once the US goes for Saddam is anybody's guess. Just as it did in the Cold War, the US will have to make trade-offs between military necessity and liberal vision. For example, the US has to work with two unrepentant *jihad* sponsors: Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The Saudis cannot be bucked because they have oil. Pakistan because it has nuclear arms.

New Delhi believes it doesn't have a dog in the Iraq fight. But it does if the US has a grand strategy. Immunising the Arab world against terrorism through a democratic vaccine is clearly in India's interests. And the big hope will be that if the US succeeds in Iraq, it may be then tempted to try the same thing in Pakistan.

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Arafat ready for talks with Israel

Associated Press

RAMALLAH, Dec. 31. — Mr Yasser Arafat today said he welcomes a US-backed call for an immediate cease-fire with Israel, but stopped short of committing to steps the Palestinians would be required to take ahead of such a truce.

In a speech marking the anniversary of the 1965 founding of his Fatah group, Mr Arafat reiterated his opposition to attacks on Israeli and Palestinian civilians.

In Gaza City, thousands of Palestinians gathered in the main square to mark the anniversary, with participants chanting "Arafat, Arafat" as his speech was played over loudspeakers. It was one of the largest gatherings since Mr Arafat returned from exile in 1994 as part of interim peace agreements.

US President George W Bush has said that the Palestinians must replace their leader if they want to establish a state.

The UN Secretary-General Mr Kofi Annan today said Mr Arafat must not be sidelined. "I know the Israeli position, but you also know the position of the vast majority of the international community that until there is a new leader, since he is the only elected leader, we have to deal with him," Annan told Israel army radio in a telephone interview from his New York office.

5 killed in Israeli crackdown

A Palestinian man was shot dead by Israeli troops overnight in the Gaza Strip, bringing the death toll from a day of heavy violence to five, as the year ended on a much less hopeful note than it began, reports AFP from Gaza City.

The latest victim, Hassan Abu Said, (40), was killed by Israeli gunfire from a Jewish settlement near Khan Yunis, the sources said. Earlier yesterday, a Palestinian gunman disguised as an Israeli soldier was shot dead in a skirmish on the Gaza-Israel border, while in the West Bank three more men were killed by Israeli soldiers, including one who was apparently beaten to death.

Two other people were injured, one critically, in the clashes in the city centre, which, like the rest of the West Bank, was reoccupied by Israel six months ago.

THE STATE

JAN 2003