

Israel loosens grip, Palestinians freed

Associated Press

BEITUNIA CHECKPOINT (West Bank), Dec. 27. — Israel released 159 Palestinian prisoners today as a gesture to the new Palestinian leadership. Interim Palestinian leader Mr Mahmoud Abbas, the front-runner in 9 January presidential elections, welcomed the release, but said Israel must free those sentenced to lengthy terms.

Some 7,000 Palestinians are held by Israel on security-related charges but those released today had only two years remaining on their sentences, and none were imprisoned for attacks on Israelis.

Mr Abbas demanded Israel release all Palestinian prisoners, including Marwan Barghouti, a promising uprising leader.

Mr Zalman Shoval, an adviser to Mr Sharon, said releasing prisoners shows Is-

rael's warming relations with Egypt, and a desire to coordinate the Gaza pullout.

Mr Sharon told Parliament's foreign affairs and defence committee he will ask his Cabinet to give final approval to the Gaza plan in February, months ahead of the June deadline, and he is ready to use force if militants try to disrupt the withdrawal, an official said on condition of anonymity.

The pullout from Gaza received a boost yesterday when residents of Peat Sadeh, a small Gaza community announced an agreement with the government to leave their homes voluntarily, beginning in March.

On the other hand, Israeli police today detained Palestinian presidential candidate Mr Mustafa Barghouti in the Old City of Jerusalem, claiming he was in the area illegally, police and a Barghouti aide said.

28 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

STILL TALKING ABOUT MEMBERSHIP

WHILE THE AGREEMENT between Turkey and the European Union (EU) to begin membership talks on October 3, 2005 is significant, the negotiations are likely to be prolonged and arduous. Turkey has undertaken reforms in many spheres to qualify for membership. However, the Turks have to do a lot more to bring their laws in consonance with the EU's exhaustive rule book on issues ranging from food hygiene to the care of children. The open-ended format for the negotiations, which might go on for at least a decade, poses a challenge in itself. If the talks drag on indefinitely, Turkey's suspicion that it is not welcome in the EU on account of bigotry and racism will get strengthened. Turkish ultra nationalists who believed that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan would not be able to break free from the religious moorings of his Justice and Development Party were out-manoeuvred when he took the initiative to clinch the agreement. These political forces will try to project any accommodation with the EU as a sell-out of Turkey's culture and traditions.

While the Erdogan Government can draw encouragement from the strong domestic sentiment in favour of integration, it is well aware that majority popular opinion in many of the 25 countries that currently make up the EU is opposed to Turkey's membership. Some governments, notably the Blair Government, have taken the initiative to educate their people about the value of such an expansion. Other governments are apparently waiting to see how the political tides flow before making up their minds. Unfortunate-

ly, at least part of the opposition to Turkey's inclusion appears to be motivated by racial and religious considerations. It is far from certain that the forces of European enlightenment and social democracy will be able successfully to counter chauvinistic arguments against granting membership in what has so far been a Christian club to a Muslim-majority country. At another level, Turkey and those who favour its accession need to convince sceptics that it can overcome its current economic backwardness and fit in with the community's economic and social performance standards.

Many of these issues can only be addressed over the long term. However, Turkey will need to bring a greater sense of urgency to resolving its dispute with Cyprus if only to improve its prospects of securing EU membership. As a full-fledged member, the island republic has a veto on the admission of new entrants and it appeared ready to use this power to block the December 17 agreement. This threat was withdrawn after Turkey promised to expand the customs union that it has with the EU so as to include Cyprus. However, the compromise could swiftly unravel. While Nicosia believes that by including it in the customs union Turkey will be granting recognition to the republic, Ankara disagrees. If it persists with its refusal to recognise a member-country of the EU, Turkey will only damage its case for inclusion. It will be a great pity if this Muslim-majority country does not secure membership in a community that in economic, social and political terms will have an ever-increasing part to play on the world stage.

25 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

Blair charts West Asia peace plan



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon shakes hands with Mr Tony Blair at a press conference in Jerusalem on Wednesday. — AFP

Associated Press

JERUSALEM, Dec. 22. — British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair today proposed holding an international conference in London next year to focus on Palestinian government and security reforms.

Mr Blair aimed to capitalise on new optimism in the region in the wake of Yasser Arafat's death. However, he said the Palestinians must crack down on militants before new peace efforts can begin, including a revival of the internationally-backed "roadmap" peace plan.

"There is not going to be any successful negotiation or peace without an end to terrorism," Mr Blair said at a news conference with Mr Sharon. "The absence of terrorism then can create the situation in which a proper negotiated settlement can take place."

Mahmoud Abbas, the interim Palestinian leader, has unsuccessfully tried to negotiate a ceasefire with Palestinian militant groups. Militants in the Gaza Strip have launched repeated mortar and rocket attacks in recent weeks on Israeli settlements and military bases.

Israeli troops raided the Khan Younis refugee camp in southern Gaza early today in which one

Palestinian militant was killed, Israeli and Palestinian officials said. Also, an Israeli civilian working on the West Bank separation barrier was shot dead by Palestinian militants.

Mr Sharon said that if there is a "full cessation of terror, hostilities and incitement, the door will be open for the road map, which will change, I believe, the life of the Israelis, the Palestinians and change the situation in the region". However, he added, "We don't see even the slightest step taken by the Palestinians. I understand there are elections now ... but they are not making even the slightest effort."

Mr Blair said his proposed London meeting would focus on strengthening and reforming the Palestinian administration, its security forces and financial system.

The Palestinians had hoped Mr Blair would propose a major international peace conference dealing with the thorny issues that have stymied past peace efforts. "I think the aim is not only to hold an economic conference or to strengthen the Palestinian Authority, these are minor things. The main aim is we need to find out if there is a peace process or not," Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia said today.

23 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Blair plays middleman in W Asia peace moves

Associated Press
Jerusalem, December 22

BRITISH PRIME Minister Tony Blair on Wednesday proposed holding an international conference in March to focus on strengthening and reforming the Palestinian administration, its security forces and financial system.

Blair aimed to capitalise on new optimism in the region in the wake of Yasser Arafat's death and Israel's moves to pull out of the Gaza Strip.

However, Blair said the Palestinians must crack down on militants before new peace efforts can begin, including a revival of the internationally backed "road map" plan. "There is not going to be any successful negotiation or peace without an end to terrorism," Blair

Careful PM nods to Arafat tomb

BRITISH PRIME Minister Tony Blair nodded briefly towards Yasser Arafat's tomb on Wednesday in what Palestinian officials said was a compromise gesture agreed at the last minute. The question of how to behave was fraught with diplomatic dangers for Blair. He inspected a Palestinian honour guard before stopping for a moment in front of the glass-walled mausoleum built after Arafat's November 12 burial in Ramallah. Blair nodded and there was a moment's silence. The Palestinians would ideally have liked Blair to lay a wreath at the grave.

Reuters, Ramallah

said during a news conference with Sharon. "The absence of terrorism then can create the situation in which a proper negotiated settlement can take place."

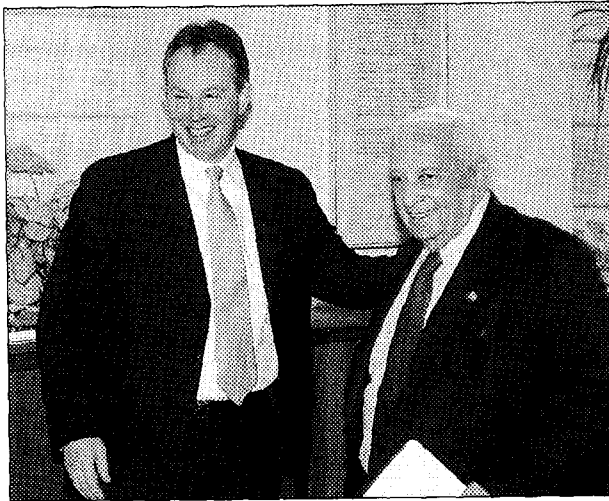
After meeting with Sharon, Blair travelled to Ramallah for talks with interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, who is running to replace Arafat in

January 9 elections.

Israel has said it has no plans to attend because the meeting will focus on internal Palestinian issues. The Palestinians had been hoping a London conference would have a wider agenda aimed at reviving the peace process.

The conference had been talked about for weeks, but Wednesday marked the first time Blair spoke of it in public. He said the meeting would have narrow goals, focusing on strengthening and reforming the Palestinian administration, its security forces and financial system.

Following the meeting with Blair, Abbas called the conference a first step toward reviving stalled peace talks. Abbas has unsuccessfully tried to negotiate a cease-fire with Palestinian militant groups and has called for an end to anti-Israel propaganda in the Palestinian media. Regardless, militants in the Gaza Strip have launched repeated mortar and rocket attacks recently on Israeli settlements and military bases.



AFP

British Prime Minister Tony Blair with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (right) in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

23 DEC 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Palestine after Arafat

By Atul Aneja

Most Palestinians appear to have concluded that their struggle for a homeland needs a new direction.

ARRIVING AHEAD of schedule, winter rains have begun lashing Ramallah, seat of the Palestinian Authority. On most days, a thin layer of mist hangs around Yasser Arafat's grave, where a Palestinian guard keeps a 24-hour vigil. People are still pouring in to pay their respects to the leader, who died in a Paris hospital last month. While Arafat's death is still fresh on their minds, Palestinians are, nevertheless, taking a hard look at their future. Most appear to have concluded that their struggle for a homeland needs a new direction.

Two key objectives have to be met. First, Israel should be made to understand that it is not in its interest to subject Palestinians to collective punishment. Israel has met suicide bombings, and even lesser attacks with demolition of houses. It has raised a network of checkpoints in the West Bank and Gaza, in order to severely restrict the free movement of Palestinian people and goods. A new "security wall" is being raised, which has begun to separate people from their land. Many believe that the 622 km-long barrier will deny Palestinians access to the West Bank's water resources.

Secondly, it has become evident that a constructive process that would hasten the creation of an independent Palestinian State should begin urgently. "We desperately need peace. It is necessary to secure the survival of our most vulnerable communities. For that, the old ways have to be altered," Ismail Daiq, the head of the Agricultural Development Association, a Palestinian NGO working with West Bank farmers, said in a conversation with *The Hindu* recently.

Dr. Daiq pointed out that the second *Intifada*, or armed uprising, which began in 2000 had not brought in the desired results. On the contrary, suicide bombings, witnessed in recent years, targeting Israeli civilians, had proved counterproductive. "It gave the Israelis a pretext to brand Palestinians as terrorists. Once this was done, it was easy for them to begin isolating us in Bantustans under the garb of security. The net result is that the Israeli occupation inside the Palestinian territories has been reinforced in the last four years." Claiming that it was responding to militant attacks, Israel took up the construction of the West Bank wall, and embarked on a project whose aims extended far beyond the reinforcement of security.

Hydrologists like Abdel Rahman Al Tamimi of the Palestinian Hydrology

Group point out that the path taken by the wall in the north cuts off Palestinian access to the groundwater in the western aquifer, the largest source of water after the Jordan river. In his view, the construction of the northern wall is the culmination of a strategy to monopolise the waters of the western aquifer. The upstream segment of the western aquifer is in the West Bank, while the downstream section is in Israel.

Shortly after the 1967 occupation of Gaza and West Bank, the Israelis effectively banned Palestinians from drilling new wells in the aquifer, fearing that such a practice would reduce availability of water in Israel. But the construction of the wall has also denied Palestinians access to 50 wells, which were dug prior to the war. Dr. Daiq explains that by setting aside the water resources of the western aquifer behind the wall, the barrier has seriously undermined the possibility of reviving West Bank agriculture, on which nearly 25 per cent of the population is dependent.

The imposition of closures by Israel has had a devastating effect on the Palestinian economy. According to a recent World Bank report, closures — a complex system of restrictions on the movement of Palestinian people and goods — have been the chief cause of the Palestinian economic decline. After four years of conflict, average Palestinian incomes have fallen by more than one-third, while 25 per cent of the working population has become unemployed. Out of a total population of around 34 lakhs, nearly six lakh Palestinians cannot afford the basic necessities. Detailing the nature of the closures, the United Nations office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported in a January 2004 study that there were 59 checkpoints within the West Bank, 10 partial checkpoints, 479 earth mounds, 75 trenches, 100 road blocks and 40 road gates — all meant for restricting the free movement of Palestinians.

Advocating an alternative approach, Terry Balata, a young political activist, says Palestinians should pursue the path of "popular resistance" based essentially on the concept of peaceful agitation, rather than violence. "We need to regain the moral high ground. For us, the first *Intifada* of 1987, which was essentially

peaceful and successful, is the benchmark. Our struggle should take off from there," she told *The Hindu*.

Ms. Balata is one of the prominent leaders behind the Palestinian Campaign for Freedom and Peace who has been inspired by the April visit of Arun Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's grandson, to the Palestinian territories. This group hopes to train a thousand activists in the techniques of passive resistance, and is emphasising the involvement of women in popular protests. "Violent actions do not attract women, the old and children. With peaceful means of resistance, we can secure a guarantee of participation of large masses from all sections of society," says Ms. Balata. Her group will stay away from extremist militant organisations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, she adds. But a conscious effort would be made to reach out to the Israeli peace camp, as well as other political and community leaders.

With Arafat's departure, the search for a new leadership within the Palestinian political mainstream is gathering momentum. "Only fresh elections to all our political bodies can bring the desired result... we will emerge stronger," Hafez Barghouti, Editor-in-Chief, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah*, a leading Palestinian daily, says. While many in the Palestinian intelligentsia maintain that a successful political transition would mean opening up senior positions to a new generation of leaders, some are of the view that this alone may not be enough.

Ahmed Harb, who teaches at the Bir Zeit University in Ramallah, believes that the basic political fault-line among Palestinians lies between those leaders who were based in Tunis but landed with Arafat in the Palestinian territories in 1994, and other "indigenous" leaders who gained prominence because of their activism at the grassroots level. "You might find not only new generation activists but also older people who were always in the territories questioning members of Arafat's entourage which came from Tunis." The disequilibrium in representation is visible most prominently within Fatah — the umbrella organisation that represents the mainstream Palestinian national movement. Of the 174 members of Fatah's central committee, there is only one member who was not part of the

Tunis leadership. Marwan Barghout, who initially planned to challenge Mahmoud Abbas to the post of Presidency in the January 9 elections, has since dropped out, is among those who did not step abroad to achieve prominence because of their role inside the territories.

Aware of the challenges ahead, Palestinian leaders stress the need for internal elections to revitalise their institutions, apart from throwing open key Palestinian bodies for poll. Once the democratic exercise takes root, it will open the space for positive external intervention, they argue. Many Palestinian leaders, therefore, believe that once they can demonstrate their commitment to democracy, the European Union as well as the United States will pressure Israel in fruitful negotiations.

While stressing on elections, mainstream Palestinian leaders are also contending with the increase in influence of groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. "The Hamas would have to make a choice. Either it slid into an Al-Qaeda style organisation or pursues the model of Turkey where a moderate party with Islamic roots governs the country," Ahmed S. Boh, former information adviser to Arafat and a deputy minister, says. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was ready to take Hamas within its fold, provided the organisation changed its course, he points out.

The Hamas, on its part, is beginning to lay stress on its political, rather than military, profile in the post-Arafat phase. For the first time the organisation with a significant following, especially in Gaza, is fielding candidates for the coming municipal elections. Hamas supporters also say that the group is likely to contest the parliamentary elections in the summer of 2005. Many Palestinian commentators are of the view that the rise of Hamas could also have a lasting impact on the evolution of Fatah in the coming days. The two organisations have been in touch with each other, and there have been reports about sections of Fatah having planned joint attacks with Hamas against Israel in the past. While it is still uncertain how the rise of new forces will shape up the political landscape, it is evident that the stage has been set for the Palestinian territories to undergo a major political transformation. Once this is achieved, the Palestinians are likely to pioneer the emergence of a genuine Arab democracy in the heart of West Asia.

20 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

A defining moment in Turkey's history

19/12
By Nicholas Watt
and David Gow HD-12

LONDON/BRUSSELS, DEC. 18. Turkey yesterday took the historic decision to set itself on the path to membership of the European Union 41 years after it first attempted to join the world's largest trading bloc.

The decision came after 24 hours of bruising negotiations, in which the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, threw out the E.U.'s first proposal and threatened to abandon the summit.

The row, which centred on a demand from Cyprus that Turkey formally recognise the island, soured the atmosphere as Ankara embarked on what will be a difficult path to membership, possibly in 10 to 15 years' time.

A pledge last night by Austria to hold a referendum on Turkish entry compounded that difficulty — every E.U. country has the right to veto the accession of a new member.

With opponents threatening to derail Mr. Erdogan's plans in the Turkish Parliament, the Prime Minister last night began the battle to sell the E.U. to his country.

"Turkey feels that our relations with the E.U. is a project of civilisation of peace and of co-operation," he told a press conference.

'Union of values'

"It is not a union of economics, it is not a Christian club. It is a union of values."

But Turkish negotiators were angered by conditions to entry imposed by E.U. countries

openly hostile to its membership. The main sticking point was an attempt by Cyprus to force Turkey to sign a customs union with all 25 members, which it would then portray as formal recognition of the island.

Enraged by the attempt to force his hand, Mr. Erdogan threw out a draft proposal by European leaders at 2.30 a.m. yesterday after talks with Jan Peter Balkenende, the Dutch Prime Minister, who is the current president of the E.U.

According to the Press Association, the row culminated in an angry exchange in a Brussels hotel in which Mr. Erdogan rounded on Mr. Balkenende.

British and German officials then took the lead in drafting a compromise proposal.

At 8.30 a.m. local time the British Prime Minister, Tony

Blair, told Mr. Balkenende that the text would have to be rewritten.

Under pressure from the Germans and the British, the Cypriots finally gave ground after lunch. compromise was agreed in which E.U. leaders noted that Turkey was willing to sign the customs union at some point before talks begin on 3 October.

This allows Turkey to maintain that it will not recognise Cyprus, but that it has volunteered to sign the customs union.

Turkey also took exception to an attempt to block it from E.U. benefits such as allowing workers to settle anywhere in the E.U. A key phrase about establishing "permanent safeguards" on these points was kept in the text. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2004

19 DEC 2004

THE HINDU

EU and Turkey in historic deal

Brussels, Dec. 17 (Reuters): The EU and Turkey reached a historic agreement today on starting talks on admitting the large Muslim nation to the bloc after last minute haggling over Ankara's relationship with EU member Cyprus.

The 25 EU leaders agreed to open accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005, but said talks would be open-ended with no guaranteed outcome in a nod to deeply sceptical public opinion in much of western Europe.

The landmark deal, which could change the face of Europe and Turkey in coming decades, came after hours of wrangling between Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, the summit chairman, mainly over Cyprus.

"(It) is an historic event. It shows that those who believe there is some fundamental clash in civilisations between Christian and Muslim are actually wrong, that we can work together and we can cooperate together," British Prime Minister Tony Blair said.

Turkey pledged unilateral



Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan in Brussels. (AFP)

ly to sign a protocol extending its EU association agreement to 10 states which joined the bloc in May, including Cyprus, before it starts entry talks.

In return, Balkenende, holder of the EU presidency, would spell out that this was not tantamount to recognition of the Greek Cypriot government in Nicosia, which Ankara has rejected until there is a settlement for the divided island.

Diplomats said the EU dropped a humiliating demand that Turkey initial the pact immediately today. At one point, Erdogan threatened to walk out after Cyprus demanded a written commitment. He was dissuaded by Balkenende, Blair and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, the diplomats said.

EU leaders kept summit guest UN secretary-general Kofi Annan waiting for one-and-a-half hours as they negotiated over Cyprus.

A Turkish official quoted Erdogan as telling Balkenende at one point: "You are choosing 600,000 Greeks

(Cypriots) over 70 million Turks, and I cannot explain this to my people."

British foreign secretary Jack Straw played down the political significance of signing the so-called Ankara protocol, saying: "It does not involve formal or informal recognition of the government of Cyprus and we have been trying to reassure the Turkish government about that."

A British diplomat noted many countries had legally binding agreements with entities such as the Palestinian Authority or Taiwan without recognising them as states.

Turkey's accession process is certain to be long and fraught with membership at least a decade away.

It will force Turkey to transform its economy and society, and require the EU to revise fundamentally its two main spending policies — farm subsidies and regional aid, which the poor nation would expect to draw on.

The EU decision made clear Turkey could not join before 2015.

The pieces of peace

VISITING the Old City of Jerusalem is an enthralling experience. It is the only place in the world where some of the holiest shrines of the three great Semitic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, can be seen together. Emerging from an Arab marketplace one enters a large open area where Jewish people are praying before the historic Wailing Wall. Behind the Wall is the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's three holiest shrines. Opposite the Wall is one of Christianity's two holiest shrines, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre — the site of the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ.

Christians and Muslims have fought for centuries for control of these holy shrines. It was, however, during Ottoman rule that it emerged that in view of the squabbling between rival sects involving the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Coptic Christians, the Custodian and Doorkeeper of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre would be a Muslim. Even today, when one enters this shrine, one would be admitted by a Muslim, Wajeeh Y Nuseibeh, whose family has for long held this post. Samuel Huntington, who forecast the "clash of civilisations", ignored centuries of enlightened rule when religious freedoms and the right to worship were respected in Jerusalem.

As the Palestinians and Israelis prepare to deal with each other in a post Yasser Arafat era, the future of Jerusalem will be a key issue. At the Camp David summit convened by President Clinton in the summer of 2000, Yasser Arafat and Prime Minister Yehud Barak came close to reaching an agreement. The summit failed, but the contours of a settlement for Israeli-Palestinian peace were broadly agreed upon. The Camp David summit was followed by negotiations at Taba on the Egyptian-Israeli border. Finally, amidst increasing vi-



In the post-Arafat era, the 'road map' awaits new travellers

■ G. PARTHASARATHY

olence by Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad and severe reprisals by Israeli forces, a "quartet" comprising the US, the European Union, Russia and the UN came out with a "road map" for peace on September 17 2002. The road map, which will follow up on broad understandings reached in Camp David and at Taba, would lead to Israeli withdrawal from about 95 per cent of territories captured on the West Bank in 1967 and from the entire Gaza strip. The Palestinians are to be "compensated" for territory not returned by Israel with a "land swap". Jerusalem is to be declared an "Open City". While the Palestinians have demanded the

punitive action and attacks on civilians. The road map also requires the Palestinian Authority to democratise its style of functioning. The peace process, therefore, depends on the will of the Palestinian Authority to end terrorist violence — a task Arafat was unwilling to undertake. Even though he played a historic role in focusing world attention on the plight of the Palestinians, he was far too tolerant of corruption and maladministration. Stories of how leaders of the Palestinian Authority have amassed wealth and live in splendid villas regularly appear in Palestinian journals. There is hope that if the interim PLO chief Mahmoud Abbas is elected to replace

regular visitor to Israel. Both Egypt and Jordan have close intelligence ties with the Jewish state. Arab countries like Morocco and Tunisia also have periodic meetings at ministerial level with Israel in international and regional meetings and Turkey has close strategic ties that cause more than a little discomfort in Arab capitals. China follows a policy of keeping silent on Middle East developments. It builds relations with major oil suppliers like Libya, Iran and Saudi Arabia by supplying them with military hardware and missiles and even nuclear technology through Pakistan. Libya received the design of a nuclear weapon tested by China in 1966 from A.Q. Khan. China simultaneously befriends Israel and obtains huge amounts of military hardware from that country. Our Communists can perhaps learn a lesson or two on diplomatic pragmatism from their Chinese comrades!

India has to recognise that it lacks the economic clout to contribute meaningfully like the Europeans to the Middle East peace process. Further, in view of the dominant role of the Americans and the supporting role of the Europeans, Russians and the UN in the "road map", there is little that India can do to influence the course of negotiations, especially if we are seen by either the Israelis or Palestinians as being partisan. There is much we can learn from major Asian powers like Japan and China about the virtues of sobriety in commenting on developments in the Middle East. Countries like Saudi Arabia should also be made to realise that they cannot condemn us in forums like the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and accord OIC recognition and support to the Geelani faction of the Hurriyat Conference on the one hand and expect us to unquestioningly back them on Middle East issues the other. Friendship is not a one way street.

India has to recognise that it lacks the economic clout to contribute meaningfully like the Europeans to the Mid-East peace process

"right of return" for all refugees to Israel, it is acknowledged that while Israel may accept those who have familial ties with Israeli Arabs, the bulk of the refugees will have to be settled in the new Palestinian state, or in Arab countries where they are currently resident. There was an understanding at Camp David that there would be Palestinian sovereignty over Arab neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem including the Muslim, Christian and Armenian Quarters of the Old City, with Israel retaining sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter and part of the Armenian Quarter.

The road map for peace, however, requires the Palestinian Authority to decisively end all terrorist violence against Israelis. Israel, in turn, is required to end

Arafat on January 9 2000, things will change for the better. Abbas, however, faces a formidable challenge from the charismatic Marwan Barghouti who is undergoing a 100 year prison term for involvement in killings of Israeli civilians. Even if Abbas wins, as is now predicted, he will face a formidable challenge in moving ahead on the peace process by acting to effectively curb terrorist violence, even though recent Israeli actions have damaged the capabilities of both Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

While the Arab and other Islamic states pass resounding resolutions in the OIC condemning Israel, many of them are regularly dealing with Israel even on sensitive issues. Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Sulaiman is a

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Mr. Sharon (W)

Israeli-Palestinian accord on election model

Press Trust of India 9/12

JERUSALEM, Dec. 8. — The Palestinian Authority has said it has worked out the logistics of the January presidential elections with Israel but denied reports that the two have reached an agreement “in principle” on a peace deal.

Senior Palestinian Cabinet minister Mr Saeb Erekat today said Israel and Palestine have agreed at using the same procedures that were in place for the last Palestinian elections in 1996.

“We received assurances that the elections of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip will take place as they did in 1996,” Mr Erekat said.

He said the Egyptians were working to support a Palestinian truce, to help train the Palestinian security forces and to revive stalled peace talks, but the report of an agreement on broad principles for ending the conflict was premature.

“What’s going on is that



Mr Ariel Sharon at the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in Jerusalem on Wednesday. — AFP

the British suggested an international conference, and we support this, but to say we reached a final conclusion is premature,” he said.

Egyptian news agency Mena had earlier reported the two parties had reached an “important understanding, reaching the point of an agreement in principle, has been completed between Egypt, Israel, Palestinians, USA and Europe, regarding a comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian struggle.”

09 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

Wild cards

Israeli, Palestinian establishments in turmoil

Soon after President Yasser Arafat's death, the cards are being reshuffled dramatically in the Mideast. It is too early to tell whether the prospects for peace are improving, but both the Israeli and Palestinian establishments, who have contributed to the current stalemate, have been thrown into turmoil. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's governing coalition had always been an unwieldy one, with ultra-orthodox groups as well as the secular Shinui; the latter has now withdrawn leaving supporters of the government with only 40 seats in a 120 member Knesset. Sharon wants to stave off the imminent collapse of his government by inducting the opposition Labour Party. That will probably save his plans to withdraw Jewish settlers from the Gaza strip; the problem is that Likud hardliners are opposed to it. If the hardliners have their way it is curtains for this government, and new elections will have to be held. On the Palestinian side, presidential elections to choose a successor to Arafat have been thrown wide open by the sudden last-minute candidacy of Marwan Barghouti, a charismatic leader of the *intifada* currently incarcerated in an Israeli jail. Prior to Barghouti's candidacy the only serious candidate was former prime minister Mahmoud Abbas, anointed by Fatah, who the Israelis and Americans also favour.

Barghouti too is a Fatah member, but the buzz against him is that he is trying to split the Fatah. But there is already a split in the movement, between the old coterie that Arafat had built around himself in Tunis and promoted to leadership positions, and younger members from the West Bank and Gaza strip who fought in the *intifada* but feel left out of the current Palestinian set-up. The 69 year old Abbas, a dry committee man, represents the old guard, while the 45 year old Barghouti, a West Banker, represents the new generation. So the contest will be one between two outlooks, and the issue of which one the ordinary Palestinian favours will be resolved. Far from splitting the Palestinians, whoever wins now in a democratically conducted exercise will have the legitimacy to negotiate on behalf of all Palestinians, which is no bad thing. Barghouti is no wild-eyed extremist who refuses to negotiate under any circumstances — he has learnt Hebrew while in jail and built contacts with the Israeli peace movement. On the Israeli side, the best possible outcome would be the fall of Sharon and election of a new Labour-dominated government, which would significantly boost the prospects for peace.

06 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

W. Abbas (12) 4/12
4/12
A PALESTINIAN DEMOCRACY

THE SUCCESSION TO Chairman Yasser Arafat appeared to be proceeding smoothly with former Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas on course to take over the various posts the departed leader had held. The transition process has now been jolted with the fiery political activist Marwan Barghouti changing his mind and deciding to contest the presidential election scheduled for January 9, 2005. Mr. Abbas appeared to have established his pre-eminence in the leadership after the Palestine Liberation Organisation chose him as its chairman, disregarding the claims of the exiled leader, Farouq Kaddoumi. There was a theoretical possibility that others in the leadership would choose someone else to head the Palestinian Authority. However, Mr. Abbas seemed to have cleared this hurdle as well when Fatah, the strongest among the conglomerate of parties that make the PLO, adopted him as its presidential candidate. The prospects for a smooth transition looked all the brighter after Hamas and Islamic Jihad decided to stay out of the race. These extremist organisations enjoy a fair measure of popular support and they could have made use of the opportunity to give Fatah notice of their clout. Now Mr. Abbas has to contend with a grass-roots challenger who is an inspiring figure for the young fighters of the second *intifada*. Mr. Barghouti is not likely to be released from the Israeli prison where he is currently incarcerated even if he does win the election. However, he can be a formidable rival since he earned the respect of many Palestinians through his campaigns against corruption and for reforms in the working of the Authority.

While Fatah's senior functionaries accused Mr. Barghouti of being politically irresponsible, most Palestinians might welcome the opportunity to exercise a real choice in the elections. As far as they are concerned, the presidential election will

merely be the first stage of a process of strengthening their democratic institutions. Elections to parliament as well as to local bodies are expected to be held by the middle of 2005 and the governing councils of both Fatah and the PLO are likely to be reconstituted. These reforms were long overdue but they could not probably have been carried out until the political situation changed. So long as Arafat was alive, no one could have posed a real challenge to his absolute dominance over the various Palestinian institutions. Mr. Abbas will at most be first among equals even if he does win the election. He will be well aware of the need for a collegiate form of governance. Senior officials of the PLO and the Authority have indicated that they will strive to strike a balance between various political forces as they supervise the transitional processes. Many of these officials returned from exile during the 1990s after the start of the Oslo negotiations, and were not fully accepted by the people who lived in the territories throughout the years of occupation. They have to fulfil their promise of giving adequate representation to the younger generation in the leadership of the political organisations and in the institutions of government.

The Palestinian national movement will come of age if it is able to create a leadership that represents diverse views. There have been several instances of much-admired leaders of liberation movements subsequently losing moral and political stock because they started suppressing divergent currents: the reason invoked by them was invariably the need to preserve unity. Palestinians have the opportunity now to demonstrate that it is possible to nurture a vibrant democratic culture even in the midst of a freedom struggle. If they successfully carry through the transition plans, they will be the first among the peoples of the Arab world to establish a true democracy.

04 DEC 2004 THE HINDU

West Asia faces double trouble

Sharon govt faces collapse as Barghouti reverses poll decision

Guardian News Service
Jerusalem, December 2

THE ISRAELI and Palestinian leaderships were in an upheaval on Wednesday night as Ariel Sharon's government faced collapse after the Prime Minister broke with his main coalition partner, and a popular Palestinian military commander launched a strong challenge from his jail cell to succeed Yasser Arafat in next month's election.

The unexpected decision by Marwan Barghouti, who is serving five life terms in an Israeli prison, to break with the dominant Fatah movement and register as a presidential candidate in the Palestinian election appeared to complicate Sharon's coalition problems.

Sharon's administration is facing collapse after his main coalition partner, the Shinui party, caused the defeat of the annual budget in parliament, threatening the planned Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

Sharon promptly sacked Shinui ministers from his cabinet, leaving the administration with just 40 seats in the 120-seat parliament. The secular Shinui had objected to Sharon "bribing" religious parties with tens of millions of pounds in budget allocations to win their support.

The Prime Minister appeared to have engineered the confrontation to force a remaking of his minority administration by bringing the opposition Labour party into the government in order to keep alive his plan to pull Jewish settlers out of the Gaza Strip.

However, there is strong opposition within Sharon's Likud party to a coalition with Labour, partic-

ularly from an influential group opposed to withdrawal from Gaza. It fears that if Labour joins the administration it will push for the closure of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

Sharon is counting on members of Likud's central committee preferring a deal with Labour to calling elections. But opposition within Likud to the Gaza withdrawal is likely to stiffen following Barghouti's decision to run for president of the Palestinian Authority.

Barghouti has thrown open the ballot by registering as an independent candidate against his own Fatah movement just hours before the deadline.

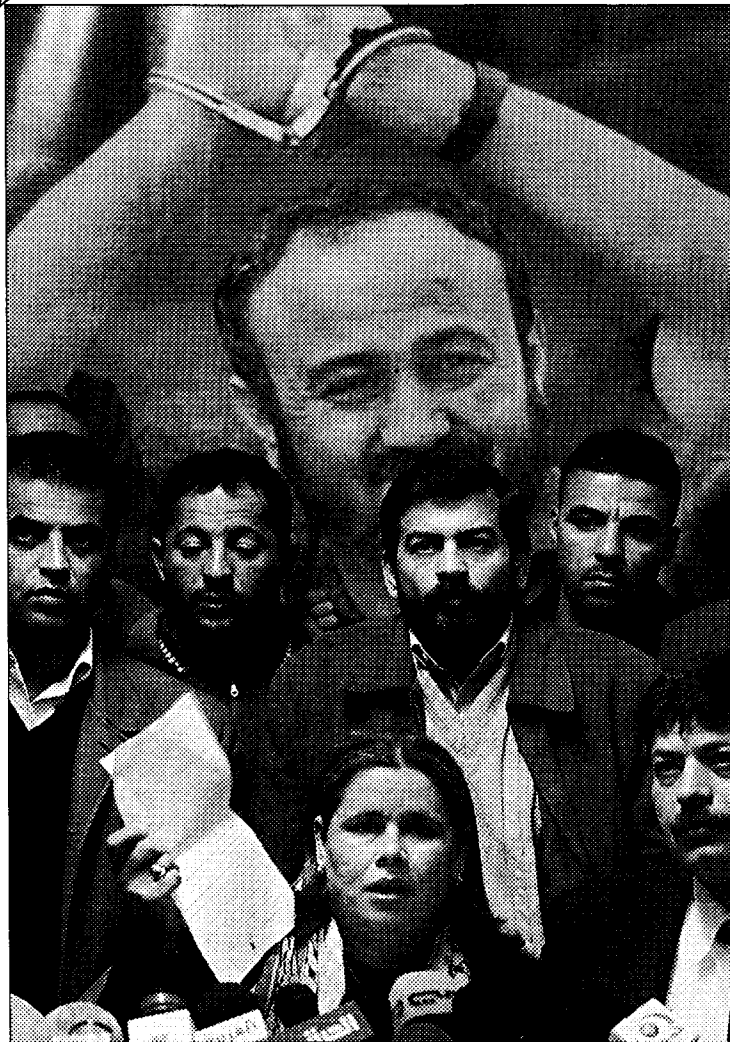
An Israeli court found him guilty of complicity in five murders this year, although he insisted he was a political, not military, leader.

His decision lays down a strong challenge to the official Fatah candidate, Mahmoud Abbas, who had been seen as Arafat's heir presumptive after taking over the reins of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

"I am running in this democratic battle ... to achieve peace on the basis of justice, freedom, the return of Palestinian refugees, and freedom for our prisoners," Barghouti said in a statement read by his wife, Fadwa Barghouti. He called for a fair election campaign.

Barghouti has widespread support as one of a younger generation of leaders committed to political reform and because he has been at the forefront of the Palestinian uprising, the intifada.

He has denounced efforts by Abbas and others to bring an end to the intifada, saying the armed struggle is a legitimate means of resisting and pressuring Israel.



Jailed Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti's wife, Fadwa (centre), shows the approved papers for her husband's candidacy in Ramallah on Wednesday.

But Barghouti has had to break with Fatah to launch his presidential bid, drawing stiff criticism from allies and other reformers who say that splitting the movement plays into Israel's hands.

Recent opinion polls show no clear favourite in a contest with Abbas and Barghouti as the principal contenders out of about 10 candidates.

Israel has said it will not release Barghouti even if he is elected as president because he is a "terrorist". But his candidacy is only likely to harden resistance among opponents of Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan who argue that pulling out of the territory will encourage more violence by rewarding terrorism.

Last week, Barghouti, under pressure from Fatah leaders, said he would not run in the January 9 election and endorsed Abbas. But yesterday Mrs Barghouti visited him in prison and then went to submit his application to the Palestinian electoral commission.

She has had several run-ins with Fatah leaders who she accuses of wanting to keep her husband in jail because of the political challenge he poses.

Palestinian sources said that on Tuesday she confronted Abbas and demanded that he make her husband's release a precondition of negotiations with Israel. The sources said that Abbas refused and Barghouti decided to register as a candidate after all.

Barghouti's challenge could provide an incentive for Israel to ease the grip of occupation and shore up support for Abbas by being seen to reward his recent efforts to curb violence. But Sharon now has his own political crisis to confront as he tries to put together a new coalition.

Senior Labour and Likud officials discussed forming a national unity government earlier this week and are expected to meet again today.

Israel pullout plan, but with a rider

HF-13
16/11

Associated Press
Jerusalem, November 15

ISRAEL ON Monday offered its first indication that it was reassessing relations with the Palestinians after Yasser Arafat's death, suggesting it would coordinate a planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip if the Palestinian Authority cracks down on militant groups.

Palestinian leaders reacted cautiously to remarks by the Foreign Ministry's spokesman and argued that Israel should "unconditionally" re-open peace talks under the US-backed "road map" plan.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had previously refused to negotiate the "unilateral disengagement plan" with Arafat, insisting that he was responsible for four years of fighting. Arafat's death in a French hospital last week has opened up what many leaders believe is a crucial opportunity to revive the West Asia peace process by clearing the way for a more moderate leadership.

If leaders emerge who are willing to stem the violence, Israel is prepared to coordinate the plan to move troops and 8,800 Jewish settlers out of the Gaza Strip and four West Bank settlements, Israeli officials said on Monday. Such coordination is considered critical to avoid a chaotic transition.

"If the Palestinian Authority takes its commitments seriously under the road map then many things that were not possible previously become possible," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said. "This includes coordinating the disengagement plan."

Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom alluded to the Israeli change in policy in a speech to American Jews in Ohio on Sunday, Regev said. Israel's security establishment is currently examining ways to work with Palestinian security



AFP

Palestinian security guards stand outside PLO chairman Mahmud Abbas's house in Gaza City on Monday.

forces to hand them control of the Gaza Strip when Israel withdraws, senior Israeli officials said on Monday. The recommendations will be discussed with Sharon in an upcoming meeting of senior officials on the matter, the officials said.

In a sign of the uncertainty, shots were fired in Gaza on Sunday as Mahmud Abbas, a leading candidate in Palestinian elections on January 9, attended a gathering of people mourning Arafat. Two security guards were killed, and fears were raised that the violence could spiral.

The Israeli conditions for coordinating the disengagement plan include the dismantling of militant groups, the collection of illegal weapons, an effort to stop anti-Israeli incitement and security and financial reforms, a senior Israeli official said.

In response, Palestinian

Cabinet Minister Saeb Erekat said he suspected the Israelis would put up too many conditions for coordinating the pullout.

The Palestinian Authority is required in the road map to combat militant groups. The plan, backed by the US, United Nations, the European Union and Russia, was formally accepted by the sides in 2003 but never got off the ground due to mutual accusations of violations.

Under the plan, Israel is slated to dismantle illegal settlement outposts and freeze settlement activity but has been reluctant to do so. The plan calls for an end to violence and the creation of a Palestinian state. In another indication that Israel was pushing ahead with its pullout plans, an Israeli parliamentary committee approved the allotment of almost \$8m to an authority overseeing the disengagement.

Arafat found 'guilty' of skimming \$2m

Press Trust of India
New York, November 15

FORMER PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat was guilty of "skimming" \$2 million per month from the gasoline trade in the territories, a US media report said today quoting people "familiar" with his financial dealings.

Last year, auditors discovered Arafat was "guilty" of skimming \$2 million a month from the gasoline trade in the territories to send his wife Suha \$200,000. The *Time* magazine said in a report in its forthcoming issue.

In August 2002, international donors forced Arafat to sign over his investments to the Palestine Investment Fund, which was audited by US accountants and managed by Palestinian Finance Minister Salam Fayyad, a former International Monetary Fund official.

After scouring corporations throughout the Arab world and bank accounts in the Cayman Islands and Luxembourg, the auditors identified \$800 million, which has been made a part of the Palestinian Authority's official budget, the report said. "It's the most successful financial reform in the Arab world," Jim Prince, president of the Los Angeles-based Democracy Council and head of the audit team, told *Time*.

Quoting people close to Fayyad's investigation, the news magazine says breaking the gasoline smuggling and corruption boosted the Palestinian Authority's official treasury by \$10m a month and re-

In death, a French gift

THE DEATH certificate issued for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat by French authorities last week indicates his place of birth as Jerusalem and not Cairo, officials said on Monday. Municipal officials at Clamart, the suburb of Paris where Arafat died last Thursday, said they issued the document on the basis of a family record book itself issued by the French foreign ministry in 1996. The issue is symbolically important because Israel considers Jerusalem as its eternal capital, while Palestinians want to make east Jerusalem, occupied by the Jewish state since 1967, the capital of their promised state.

AFP, Paris

duced gas prices for ordinary Palestinians. "Arafat's death means his followers may never know just how much more they may be owed," *Time* says.

In the mid-1990s, Arafat controlled a financial empire worth at least \$3 billion but by the time of his death, he was down to his last \$1 billion, *Time* says quoting Israeli intelligence estimates. Arafat wife Suha's outburst that his successors were 'trying to bury (him) alive' came after she learned that Arafat had signed over at least \$800m to the government of the Palestinian Authority two years ago, *Time* says.

Suha relinquishes, but at a price

THE TIMES, LONDON

JERUSALEM, Nov. 13. — As Suha Arafat bade farewell to her husband in Cairo yesterday, she has reportedly relinquished the control that she exercised so tightly during his final illness, but at a heavy price to the funds of the Palestinian leadership.

One widely-reported claim that she would receive a pension of almost £2 million annually for her widowhood in Paris was greeted with scepticism. The belief, however, persisted that she had reached a cash deal in bedside talks with leading Palestinians shortly after her outburst last week when she accused them of "trying to bury my husband alive".

The £12 million claim appeared in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. It said that PLO's new chairman Mahmoud Abbas, who is in charge of all bank accounts of Arafat, has personally made the promise and claimed that in July Arafat transferred \$11 million (£6 million) to his wife to cover her living costs for the first six months of the year.

But Arnon Regular, the West Bank correspondent of the Israeli daily newspaper *Ha'aretz*, said that the Italian figure was not credible.

"There have been a lot of exaggerations this week about the amount involved," he said.

"I know from French diplomatic sources that Suha was offered \$2 million as a settlement by the Palestinians and she turned it down. Assumably, they have

reached an amicable agreement as she had stopped accusing them of trying to bury Arafat alive and forbidding access to him.

"But I would imagine that the final figures are nearer to the original offer of \$2 million than to the Italian claim of \$22 million a year," he said.

Forbes magazine placed Arafat sixth on its list of the world's "wealthiest kings, queens and despots". Former PLO finance minister Jawid al-Ghusein said that when he resigned in 1996, Arafat's financial empire was worth \$6.6 billion.

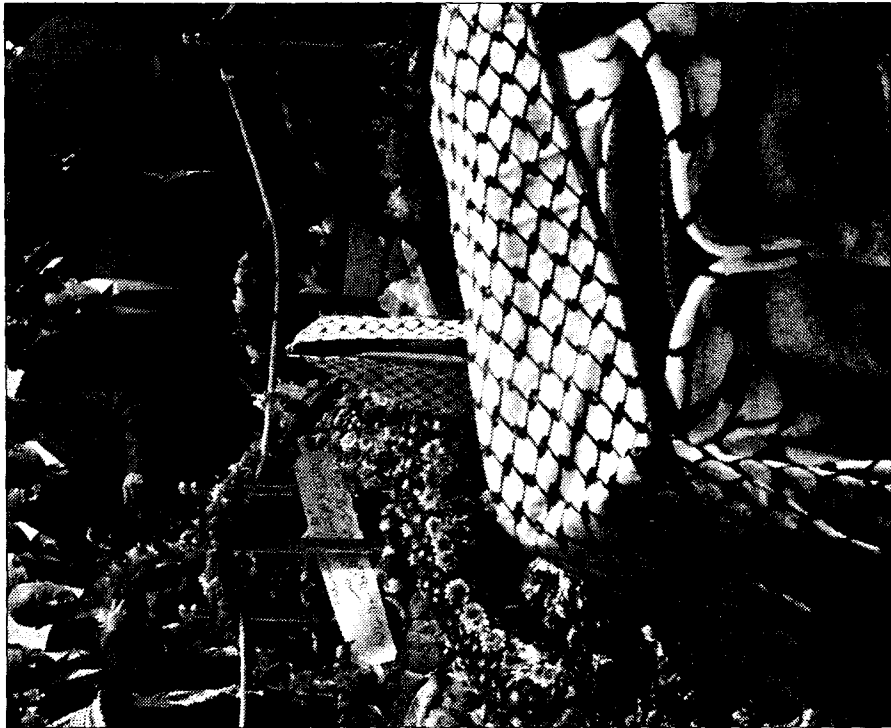
According to Mr Al Ghussein, Arafat began to acquire wealth from the late 70s, when the PLO began receiving some \$200 million a year as donations from Arab countries.

Meanwhile, a senior Palestinian official has renewed suspicions that Yasser Arafat might have died of poisoning, in an interview with a Turkish newspaper today, AFP adds from Ankara.

Arafat's nephew and Palestinian representative at the United Nations, Nasser al-Qidwa told the daily *Vatan* that Arafat's health problem was in "such a complicated condition that a diagnosis was not possible".

On rumours about Arafat might have been poisoned, Al-Qidwa was quoted as saying: "This is our biggest suspicion. If it were a normal death, it would have been possible to diagnose it so far."

Arafat's personal physician, Ashraf al-Kurdi, has called for an inquiry into his death.



Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qorei (third from left), prays at the grave of Yasser Arafat inside the Muqata complex on Saturday. — AFP

Bush, Blair back Palestinian state

Associated Press
Washington, November 13

US PRESIDENT BUSH and British Prime Minister Tony Blair have pledged to rally global support for an independent Palestinian state, but said that reviving the stalled West Asia peace talks rests with those mourning the passing of longtime Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

At the White House on Friday, British Prime Minister Tony Blair joined Bush in suggesting that Arafat's death created an opportunity to create a Palestinian state after decades of failed attempts at brokering peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

"I'd like to see it done in four years," said Bush, referring to the length of his second term. "I think it is possible. I think it is possible."

Blair interjected, "What we are saying is, we are going to work flat out to deliver this."

Elections for Arafat's successor are to be held within 60 days, and Bush said he hoped the winner would embrace the notion of a democratic state. He had refused to even meet with Arafat, whom he regarded as the primary obstacle to peace with Israel.

"This is the first step in creating lasting, democratic political institutions through which a free Palestinian people will elect local and national leaders," the President said. "We're committed to the success of these elections and we stand ready to help."

Bush also used his joint appearance to announce that he will visit Europe after his January 20 inauguration — a trip intended to repair relations with allies, who have been upset by the Iraq war and what many perceive as Washington's go-it-alone approach on foreign policy.

Reporters were told in a White House briefing that Bush would probably make the trip in February and that a stop in Brussels for meetings at either the European Union or Nato or both was also likely.

"In my second term, I will work to deepen our trans-Atlantic ties with the nations of Europe," the President said. "We must apply the combined strength and moral purpose of Europe and America to effectively fight terror and to overcome poverty and disease and despair, to advance human dignity and to advance freedom."



FRIENDS & ROSES US President George W. Bush with British Prime Minister Tony Blair at the White House on Friday.

AFP

While Bush refused to embrace Blair's proposal for a conference on West Asia early next year, or calls for the appointment of a special envoy for West Asia, he said the United States, Britain and other nations had an obligation to search for a path to peace. Neither leader, however, offered any new details of how that might be achieved.

"We are going to develop a strategy so that once the elections are over, we will be able to say, 'Here's how we will help you. If you want to be helped, here's what we're willing to do,'" Bush said. "If you choose not to be helped, if you decide you don't want a free, democratic society, there's nothing we can do."

Bush and Blair promised to mobilise the international community and world opinion to build up Palestinian political, economic and security institutions to create the foundation for a democratic state. Israel's foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, who is to meet on Monday with Secretary of State Colin Powell,

Prez spends evening out with friend

PRESIDENT BUSH spent Friday evening at the home of Clay Johnson, a college friend and administration official who also has a hand in shaping Bush's second-term Cabinet. The President spent about two hours at Johnson's house in a Washington suburb. Johnson, deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, and

said this week that the new Palestinian leadership "will have to prove itself" before a peace process can go forward.

Powell expects to meet with new Palestinian leaders soon, with discussions ongoing about time and place, a senior State Department official said.

Powell, meanwhile, expressed some uncertainty about how fast a Palestinian state could become a reality

White House chief of staff Andy Card are among those who are intimately involved in discussions on second-term personnel. Bush's longtime friend also worked with him while he was Texas governor and later served as head of the Bush-Cheney transition team into the Oval Office in 2001.

AP, Washington

— a goal Bush once hoped to see accomplished in 2005. Powell told the Arab television network, Al-Arabiya, that Bush wants to see a Palestinian state as soon as possible but, "It would be a little hard for him to say, 'There will be one in one year, two years, three years, four years, because it is truly up to the parties'."

Palestinian Cabinet Minister Saeb Erekat issued an appeal to Bush to "please

make sure we have free and fair presidential elections in 60 days. If elections are obstructed by Israeli occupation, this will be the path of more chaos. This is your opportunity, this is a historic opportunity, we have an historic moment Mr President. Seize it".

Bush said he would work with Israel to complete its plan for withdrawal from Gaza and part of the West Bank. But he did not pressure Israel to revive negotiations or freeze the expansion of settlements.

Israel endorsed Bush's message, but said terrorism by the Palestinians must stop before there is a state.

"Bush is putting it as a challenge to the future Palestinian leadership," said Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

"He says 'It's up to you and you have a new situation.' ... The fact is that there is a new era now. He is urging them to drop the Yasser Arafat legacy."

'Tony is nobody's poodle'

Associated Press
Washington, November 13

TO BE or not to be a poodle. That was the question and President George W. Bush answered that Britain's Tony Blair was a faithful friend, but nobody's pet.

The US leader was visibly not amused when asked half-jokingly at a news conference with Blair whether he agreed with the occasional characterisation of his closest European ally in Iraq as "your poodle".

Glowing, Bush responded that Blair was a strong, capable leader who "made a decision because he wanted to do a duty to secure the people of Great Britain".

"I admire him a lot," Bush went on. "You know why? When he tells you something, he means it. You ever spend much time in politics? You'll notice there are people around this kind of line (of work) where, they tell you something, they don't mean it."

"He's a big thinker. He's got a clear vision. And when times get tough, he doesn't wilt. You know, when the criticism starts to come his way — I suspect that might be happening on occasion — he stands for what he believes in."

It was more praise than asked for by Blair, who stood by somewhat sheepishly as the question of his poodleness was posed.

"Don't answer yes," was all he told Bush.

Bigley memorial

Blair attended a multi-faith memorial service on Saturday for Kenneth Bigley, the British hostage who was beheaded by Iraqi militants last month re-igniting anti-war feelings in Britain. Blair, who flew to Bigley's hometown of Liverpool after meeting US President George W. Bush in Washington, attended the service at the request of the murdered engineer's relatives.

14 NOV 2004

ইয়াসের আরাফত (১৯২৯-২০০৪)

শ্রী
১৯২৯-২০০৪



এ কথুখ খোঁচা-খোঁচা সাদা দাড়ি, সর্বশেষ মিলিটারি সবুজ মাথা ঢাকা আরব বেনুইনের প্রাথমিক শিরস্ত্রাণে— এই মানুষটিকে আর পশ্চিম এশিয়ার রণঙ্গনে দেখা যাবে না। পঁচাত্তর বছর বয়সে এই সেনানীর হাত থেকে পড়ে গেল। তিনি, ইয়াসের আরাফত, প্যালেষ্টাইনকে অন্যায় চলে গেলেন। সাধারণ ব্যবসায়ী পরিবারে জন্ম হয়েছিল তাঁর। কেউ বলে কায়রোয়, কেউ বলে গাজায়, তাঁর নিজের মতে জেরুজালেম। তার পর সবার ছোটবেলা যেমন কাটে, তাঁরও তেমনই কাটছিল। প্যালেষ্টাইন তখন ব্রিটিশ অধিকারে, ইহুদিদের হাতে সে অধিকার তুলে দিতেই সংঘর্ষের শুরু। শুরু ভিটে কামাড়ে থাকতে না পারার অসহায়তার, উদ্বাস্তু জীবনের দীক্ষার, সংগ্রাম ও প্রতিরোধের, অস্ত্র ও হিংসার, বারুদ ও রক্তের নিরবচ্ছিন্নতার।

এর মধ্যেও আরাফত নিয়মমাফিক পড়াশোনা করেছেন। কায়রো বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে প্রযুক্তিবিদ্যার পাঠক্রমে ভর্তি হয়েছেন, পড়াশোনার চেয়ে প্যালেষ্টাইন ছাত্রদের সংগঠন ও লড়াইয়ে বেশি মনোযোগী হলেও ভিত্তি অর্জনে অসুবিধা হয়নি। সেই ভিত্তি নিয়ে কুয়েতে ইঞ্জিনিয়ারের চাকরিতে যোগ দিয়েছেন, অল্পবিস্তর বাবাসাপত্রও করেছেন। কিন্তু বিংশ শতাব্দীর শেষার্ধ্বে একজন প্যালেষ্টাইন যে নিয়তি নিয়ে জন্মায়, আরাফত তা খণ্ডন করবেন কী করে? তাই রোজগারের পরমাণু আটপালনে খরচ হয়ে যায়। ১৯৫৮ সালে মিশরের যখন গামাল আবদেল নাসের, ভারতে জওহরলাল নেহরু, চিনে মাও-জে-দঙ এবং সোভিয়েত শিবির আমেরিকার প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী বৃহৎশক্তি, তখন আরাফত তাঁর সহনৈবাসিত প্যালেষ্টাইনদের নিয়ে গড়ে তুললেন 'আল ফাতাহ', আজ পর্যন্ত যা প্যালেষ্টাইন মুক্তি সংগ্রামের মন্থকেন্দ্র। শুরু হয় বেহাত স্বদেশ হাসিল করার লড়াই, ইজরায়েলের বিরুদ্ধে গেরিলা আক্রমণ। ঘরোয়া সারের যেতে বাধ্য হলেন।

সর্বসম্মত প্যালেষ্টাইনের জন্ম লড়াই এখান থেকেই মোড় ঘুরতে থাকে। শুরু হয় মার্কিন মধ্যস্থতায় ইজরায়েলের সঙ্গে আলোচনা, দরকষাকষি। এর পর মাদ্রিদে শান্তি সম্মেলন, হোয়াইট হাউসে ইজরায়েলি প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে ঐতিহাসিক করমর্দন, অসলো চুক্তির শর্ত অনুযায়ী গাজা ও ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংকে প্যালেষ্টাইন স্বায়ত্তশাসনের শক্তিমুক্তি।

কিন্তু ইজরায়েল তার প্রতিশ্রুতি থেকে সরে যেতে থাকে, নিতানুভন শর্ত আরোপ করতে থাকে এবং বিরক্ত ও হতাশ প্যালেষ্টাইন যুবকরা আরাফতের আবেদন এক রকম উপেক্ষা করেই ইস্তিকলাদার দ্বিতীয় পর্যায় শুরু করে দেয়। আরাফত জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী হামাস, হেজবুল্লা ও ইসলামি জিহাদের সন্ত্রাসবাদীদের প্রতি নরম মনোভাব নিচ্ছেন, এই অজুহাতে ইজরায়েল রামাধানয় তাঁর সদর-দফতরে হানা দিয়ে কার্যত তাঁকে অন্তরীণ করে ফেলে। ক'দিন আগে সেখান থেকেই অসুস্থ আরাফতকে হাসপাতালে চিকিৎসার জন্য উড়িয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া হয়।

আরাফত যে ক্রমশ প্যালেষ্টাইনদের মধ্যে তাঁর আগের জনপ্রিয়তা হারাচ্ছেলেন, এ বিষয়ে সংশয় নেই। হামাসের মতো জঙ্গি গোষ্ঠী তাঁকে আপসকারী, এমনকী 'ইহুদিদের দালাল' বলেও গাল দিয়েছে। যারা অপেক্ষাকৃত নরমপন্থী এবং মনোভাব ও কাষপদ্ধতির নিপা করতেন। তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে আর্থিক হস্তক্ষেপের অভিযোগও উঠেছিল। তবে আরব দেশগুলির শাসকদের সঙ্গে তুলনা করলে আরাফতের পি এল ও ছিল অতিমাত্রায় গণতান্ত্রিক, সাংগঠনিক নির্বচনামূলক হওয়া নিয়মিত। আর পি এল ওকে আরাফতই

একটি বামপন্থী দিশায় চালিত কদ্রাঙ্কলেন। তাঁর নেতৃত্বের বৈপ্লবিকতা স্বেচ্ছাচারী, প্রায়শ রাজতন্ত্রী আরব রাষ্ট্রনায়কদের বিরক্তির কারণ হয়ে উঠেছিল এবং কেউই প্যালেষ্টাইনি শরণার্থীদের নিজ দেশে ঠাই দিয়ে স্বস্তি বোধ করতেন না, পাছে প্যালেষ্টাইনদের সংস্পর্শে ওই সব দেশেও বিদ্রোহাকাঙ্ক্ষা জাগ্রত হয়! কুয়েত অগ্রাসনের পর সাদাম হুসেইনের প্রতি তাঁর প্রকাশ্য সমর্থন অনেক সাবেক আরব মিত্রকেও তাঁর প্রতি বিরূপ করে তোলে। তাঁকে মারবার চেষ্টিও কম হয়নি। হামাস তো ছিলই, জর্ডন, সিরিয়া, ইরান ও সৌদি আরবের মতো দেশও তাঁর ভাবী যাতকদের নিয়োগ করত।

তাঁর 'জাতশত্রু' ইজরায়েলই শুধু কখনও তাঁকে প্রাণে মারার চেষ্টা করেনি। ইহুদি নেতৃত্ব বৃদ্ধাঙ্কিত, আরাফতই প্যালেষ্টাইনীদের সঙ্গে আপসের শেষ আশা। মুখে এরিয়েলে শারনেরা যতই আরাফতকে গালমন্দ করুন, সামরিক খেরাও দিয়ে তাঁকে চাপে রাখুন, তাঁরা জানতেন, এই মুক্তিযোদ্ধাটি কোনও লড়াইখাপা সন্ত্রাসী নয়, বরং একজন শুদ্ধ আদর্শবাদী। তাই বহু সুযোগ পেয়েও আরাফতকে হত্যা করা দুঃস্থান, ইজরায়েল তাঁকে এমনকী প্যালেষ্টাইনি জঙ্গিদের হাত থেকেও বাঁচিয়ে রেখেছিল। আজ তাই শ্যারন যদি তাঁর সুযোগ্য ও মর্যাদাসম্পন্ন প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বীর উদ্দেশে টুপি খুলে অভিবাদন জানান, তাতে আশ্চর্যের কিছু নেই। কারণ আরাফতের প্রায়ণ প্যালেষ্টাইনি মুক্তিসংগ্রামে যে শূন্যতা সৃষ্টি করবে, তা প্যালেষ্টাইনকে নিতান্ত কল্পরাষ্ট্রের সীমানাতেই আটকে রাখতে পারে। সে ক্ষেত্রে ইস্তিকলাদার তৃতীয় ও তৎকর্তর পর্যায়ের জন্য শ্যারনকে প্রস্তুত থাকতে হতে পারে। শ্যারন অবশ্য ইতিমধ্যেই জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, আরাফতের প্রায়ণ পশ্চিম এশিয়ায় শান্তিপ্রতিষ্ঠার ক্ষেত্রে একটি ক্রান্তিলগ্ন হিসাবে দেখা দিতে পারে। অবশ্য তিনি জানতে উল্লেখ না যে নয়া প্যালেষ্টাইনি নেতৃত্ব 'সন্ত্রাসের বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধ' ঘোষণা করতে চাইছেন কি না, সেটাই সর্বশ্রেণে দেখার বিষয়।



আরাফতের অন্ত্যেষ্টি হচ্ছে আজ কায়রোয়

প্যারিস, ১১ নভেম্বর: প্যারিসের একটি সেনা হাসপাতালে আজ ভোরে মৃত্যু হয়েছে প্যালেস্তাইনের প্রেসিডেন্ট ইয়াসের আরাফতের। গত ৩ নভেম্বর আরাফত কোমায় চলে যাওয়ার পর এক সপ্তাহ ধরে তাঁর শারীরিক অবস্থা নিয়ে নানা গুজব শোনা গেলেও পার্সি হাসপাতাল কর্তৃপক্ষ আজই আনুষ্ঠানিক ভাবে তাঁর মৃত্যুসংবাদ ঘোষণা করেছেন। ২৯ অক্টোবর রামালা থেকে তাকে প্যারিস নিয়ে আসা হয়। মঙ্গলবার রাতে মস্তিষ্কে রক্তক্ষরণ হওয়ায় তাঁর অবস্থার অবনতি হয়। আরাফতের দেহ প্যারিস থেকে মিশরের রাজধানী কায়রোয় নিয়ে যাওয়া হবে। শুক্রবার সেখানে ইসলামি রীতিতে অন্ত্যেষ্টি হওয়ার পর শনিবার রামালায় তাঁর সদর দফতরেই সামরিক মর্যাদায় সমাহিত করা হবে আরাফতকে।

আরাফতের মৃত্যুর পর অবধারিত ভাবে সামনে চলে এসেছে তাঁর উত্তরসূরির প্রসঙ্গটি। প্যালেস্তাইনের স্পিকার রাউহি ফাতুহ প্যালেস্তাইনের অন্তর্ভুক্তিকালীন প্রেসিডেন্ট মনোনীত হয়েছেন। এই মুহূর্তে তাঁর প্রধান কাজ ৬০ দিনের মধ্যে দেশে সাধারণ নির্বাচন করে নতুন প্রেসিডেন্টকে দায়িত্ব ফিরিয়ে দেওয়া। প্যালেস্তাইনের প্রাক্তন প্রধানমন্ত্রী ও নরমপন্থী নেতা মাহমুদ আব্বাস প্যালেস্তাইন লিবারেশন অর্গানাইজেশনের (পি এল ও) চেয়ারম্যান মনোনীত হয়েছেন। প্যালেস্তাইন আন্দোলনের ফতাহ সংগঠনের নেতৃত্বে এসেছেন কটরপন্থী নেতা ফারুক কাদুমি। প্যালেস্তাইনের বর্তমান প্রধানমন্ত্রী আহমেদ কুরেই দৈনন্দিন প্রশাসনিক দায়িত্বের পাশাপাশি নিরাপত্তা সংগঠনগুলিরও দায়িত্ব নেবেন। আরাফতের অবর্তমানে সংগঠনের কটরপন্থী ও সংস্কারপন্থীদের মধ্যে ক্ষমতার লড়াই এড়াতেই এ ভাবে ক্ষমতার বিভাজনের সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে। তবে শীর্ষ নেতার মৃত্যুতে ইজরায়েলের সঙ্গে শান্তি প্রক্রিয়া যে ব্যাহত হবে না তা আজ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন প্যালেস্তাইনি বিদেশমন্ত্রী নাবিল সাখ। কিন্তু সদ্যনির্বাচিত ফতাহ প্রধান ফারুক কাদুমি বলেছেন, “রাজনৈতিক সমাধানে সংঘাতই একমাত্র পথ।”

গাজা ও ওয়েস্ট ব্যাঙ্কে ৪০ দিনের রাষ্ট্রীয় শোক ঘোষণা করেছে প্যালেস্তাইন। গত এক সপ্তাহ ধরেই আরাফতের সমাধিস্থল নিয়ে ইজরায়েলের সঙ্গে দীর্ঘ টালবাহানা চলেছে। আরাফতের ইচ্ছা ছিল জেরুজালেমের আল আকসা মসজিদে তাঁকে সমাধি দেওয়া হোক। কিন্তু ইজরায়েল সেই দাবি মেনে নেয়নি। শেষ পর্যন্ত রামালায় ইজরায়েলি ট্যাঙ্কে গুঁড়িয়ে যাওয়া আরাফতের সদর দফতর মোকাতাকে তাঁর সমাধিস্থল হিসেবে মেনে নেয় শ্যারন সরকার। কিন্তু আরব নেতারা ও প্যালেস্তাইনি কর্তৃপক্ষ স্থির করেন আরাফতের জন্মস্থান কায়রোতে তাঁর অন্ত্যেষ্টি সম্পন্ন হবে। আল আকসার মসজিদ চত্বরে আরাফতের সমাধির দাবি জিইয়ে রেখেই আরব নেতারা ঘোষণা করেছেন রামালায় তাঁকে অস্থায়ী ভাবে কবর দেওয়া হবে। প্যালেস্তাইনি মন্ত্রী

এর পর ছয়ের পাতায়

আরাফতের অন্ত্যেষ্টি আজ

প্রথম পাতার পর

জামাল শুবাকি জানিয়েছেন, আরাফতের সমাধির জন্য জেরুজালেম থেকে মাটি আনানো হয়েছে। সম্ভাব্য স্থানান্তরের কথা মাথায় রেখে তাঁর দেহ কংক্রিটের কফিনে রাখা হবে। নীচে বিছিয়ে দেওয়া হবে জেরুজালেমের মাটি।

আরাফত কোমায় চলে যাওয়ার পর ইজরায়েলি সূত্রে পাওয়া খবরের ভিত্তিতে তাঁর ‘মৃত্যুতে’ শোকবার্তা পাঠিয়েছিলেন মার্কিন প্রেসিডেন্ট জর্জ বুশ। আজ তিনি বলেছেন, “প্যালেস্তাইনের ইতিহাসে আজ এক সন্ধিক্ষণ। আমি আশা করি ভবিষ্যতে স্বাধীন ও গণতান্ত্রিক প্যালেস্তাইনের জন্ম হবে যে দেশ তার প্রতিবেশীদের সঙ্গে শান্তি বজায় রেখে চলবে।” ইজরায়েলের প্রধানমন্ত্রী আরিয়েল শ্যারন বলেছিলেন, শান্তির পথে আরাফতই সবচেয়ে বড় বাধা। আজ তাঁর মৃত্যুর পর শ্যারন বলেছেন, “সাম্প্রতিক ঘটনাবলী পশ্চিম এশিয়ার পক্ষে অত্যন্ত গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। তবে সব কিছুই নির্ভর করছে সন্ত্রাস পুরোপুরি বন্ধ হচ্ছে কিনা তার উপর।” ফরাসি প্রেসিডেন্ট জাক শিরাক বলেছেন আরাফতের মৃত্যুর পরে পশ্চিম এশিয়ায় শান্তি ফেরাতে ইউরোপীয় ইউনিয়ন ও অন্যান্য আন্তর্জাতিক সংগঠনগুলির আরও সক্রিয় হওয়া প্রয়োজন। আরাফতের মৃত্যুতে শোক প্রকাশ করেছেন ভারতের প্রধানমন্ত্রী মনমোহন সিংহও। শোকবার্তায় তিনি বলেন “এক প্রকৃত দেশপ্রেমিক ও বন্ধু হিসেবেই আরাফতকে আমরা মনে রাখব।”

গোটা বিশ্বের বিভিন্ন রাষ্ট্রের প্রতিনিধি ও আরব নেতারা আরাফতের অন্ত্যেষ্টিতে উপস্থিত থাকবেন। মিশরের প্রেসিডেন্ট হোসনি মুবারক, দক্ষিণ আফ্রিকার প্রেসিডেন্ট থাবো এমবেকি, চিনের উপ প্রধানমন্ত্রী হুই লিয়াঙ্গু, পাকিস্তানের প্রধানমন্ত্রী শওকত আজিজ, মার্কিন উপ বিদেশসচিব এবং ইংল্যান্ড, ফ্রান্স ও জার্মানির বিদেশমন্ত্রীর কায়রোয় এই অন্ত্যেষ্টি যোগ দেবেন। ভারত থেকে ইউ পি এ সরকারের প্রতিনিধি হিসেবে যাবেন বিদেশমন্ত্রী নটবর সিংহ, রেলমন্ত্রী লালুপ্রসাদ যাদব, বিদেশ প্রতিমন্ত্রী ই আহমেদ। বামদলের পক্ষ থেকে যাবেন সীতারাম ইয়্যেচুরি।

আরাফতের মৃত্যুতে হিংসা ছড়িয়ে পড়ার আশঙ্কায়

ওয়েস্ট ব্যাঙ্ক ও গাজা সীমান্ত সিল করে দিয়েছে। হামাস জঙ্গিরা ইতিমধ্যেই ঘোষণা করেছে ইজরায়েলিদের উপর আক্রমণ চালিয়ে যাবে তারা। আজ আরাফতের মৃত্যুর খবর পাওয়ার কিছু ক্ষণের মধ্যেই গাজার একটি ইহুদি বসতিতে হামলা চালিয়েছে ফতাহ জঙ্গিরা। এই ঘটনা ইজরায়েলের সঙ্গে ফের সংঘর্ষ শুরু হওয়ার ইঙ্গিত বলে মনে করছেন অনেকেই। রামালাতেও ইজরায়েলি সেনাদের লক্ষ্য করে পাথর ছুড়েছে উত্তেজিত জনতা। আরাফতের নেতৃত্বাধীন আল আকসা শহিদ ব্রিগেডের মুখপাত্র আবু কুসেই বলেছেন, আরাফতের মৃত্যুর জন্য ইজরায়েলই দায়ী। গত তিন বছর ধরে রামালায় তাঁর দফতরে অত্যন্ত জঘন্য পরিস্থিতিতে আরাফতকে গৃহবন্দি অবস্থায় থাকতে বাধ্য করেছে শ্যারনের সেনারা। তার ফলে চিকিৎসার কোনও রকম সুযোগই পাননি বর্ষীয়ান আরাফত। দু’দিন আগে প্যারিসে একই অভিযোগ করেছিলেন প্যালেস্তাইনি বিদেশমন্ত্রী নাবিল সাখও। এই অভিযোগ অস্বীকার করে ইজরায়েল। এই খবর রয়টার্সের।

বৈঠক বাতিল করল বামেরা। নয়াদিল্লি থেকে স্টাফ রিপোর্টার জানাচ্ছেন, প্যালেস্তাইন প্রমুখ নেতাদের মতামত কতটা দৃঢ়, তা কেন্দ্রকে বোঝাতে কসুর করলেন না বামেরা। মনমোহন সিংহের অনুরোধ সত্ত্বেও ইউপিএ-বাম সমন্বয় কমিটির বৈঠক করলেন না তারা। কারণ, আরাফতের মৃত্যু।

সমন্বয় কমিটির নির্ধারিত বৈঠকের আগে আজ বামপন্থীরা সি পি এম অফিসে নিজেদের মধ্যে বৈঠকে বসার সময় নিশ্চিত খবর আসে, আরাফত মারা গিয়েছেন। বাম নেতারা স্থির করেন, এই অবস্থায় প্রধানমন্ত্রীর সঙ্গে মধ্যস্থতাচেষ্টা বা বৈঠক, সম্ভব নয়। বামদলের একাংশ বৈঠকে মত দিলেও এ বিবর্ধন ও হরকিষণে সিংহ সুরজিতের বিরোধিতায় তা বাতিল করা হয়। পরে এক বাম নেতা বলেন, “এর পর সরকার নিশ্চয়ই বুঝবে, ইজরায়েলের সঙ্গে যনিষ্ঠতার চেষ্টা হলে আমরা কী ভাবে বিরোধিতা করব।”

এ দিকে, আরাফতের মৃত্যুতে শুক্রবার ‘রাজ্যের গণতান্ত্রিক আন্দোলনের সব কর্মী কালো ব্যাজ পরে শোক দিবস পালন করবেন’ বলে জানিয়েছেন সি পি এম রাজ্য সম্পাদক অনিল বিশ্বাস।

NOV 2004

ANADARAZAR PATEKA

MR PALESTINE DEAD

Amid grief, fears of a succession feud

Agencies
Ramallah, November 11

YASSER ARAFAT, who rose from guerrilla icon to Nobel Peace Prize-winner but ended up isolated and locked in conflict with Israel, died in a French hospital today at the age of 75. The announcement of the death of the Palestinian president, who symbolised his people's fight for an independent state but failed to achieve it in his lifetime, ended days of confusion over his condition as he lay comatose behind a veil of secrecy.

The death of the man Washington had shunned

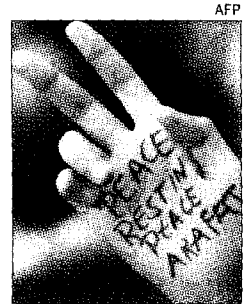
as an "obstacle to peace" could stir renewed hopes for peace, but fears remained of a succession battle that could thrust Palestinian territories into chaos and push the region into deeper crisis.

Across Palestinian areas — where a 40-day mourning period has been declared — thousands rushed on to the streets amid wails of grief and volleys of gunfire. "Our father is dead," Fathi Abu Adnan said in Gaza, where gunmen pumped bullets into the air and youths burned tyres on the roads, sending up plumes of smoke as Koranic verses blared from loudspeakers.

Arafat's body was flown to Cairo for his funeral tomorrow, to be followed by burial in Ramallah, his headquarters. Arafat will be buried in a stone coffin, not a wooden one, to allow his reinterment at a later time at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque after peace has been achieved with Israel. For now, earth brought from Jerusalem will be poured under his coffin so that he "is buried on Jerusalem soil".

President Bush suggested Arafat's death could open the door to Palestinian statehood and reconciliation with Israel. Israel, however, sealed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip, fearing an explosion of violent protests.

■ See Pages 3, 13 & 14



A woman's message at a gathering in Paris.

Indian team

Union ministers Natwar Singh, Laloo Yadav, Ghulam Nabi Azad, E. Ahamed and CPM leader Sitaram Yechury will attend Arafat's funeral in Cairo on Friday.



AFP

IN THE RACE

MARWAN BARGHOUTI (45)



Most popular & the top contender. Is in an Israeli jail on mass murder charges

AHMED KOREI (67)

PM since Sept 2003. An architect of the 1993 Oslo peace accords but has no power base



MAHMOUD ABBAS (69)



Long Arafat's No. 2 in PLO, was PM from May to Sept 2003. Co-founded Fatah

RAUHI FATTUH (55)

To be Prez by law for the next 60 days till polls. Doesn't have much clout or popularity



MOHAMMED DAHLAN



The young MoS for security. US and Israel feel they can do business with him

CURRENT STATUS

FATTUH: President

ABBAS: PLO chairman

KOREI: Cabinet, security head

12 NOV 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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12 NOV 2004

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

FOOT SOLDIER

ARAFAT'S LIFE STORY

Aug 4, 1929: Born in Cairo, Egypt

1949: Moves back to Cairo; forms Palestinian Students' League

Aug 1956: Attends international student congress in Prague, secures membership for Palestine. For first time, wears Palestinian headdress, or keffiyeh

Jan 1, 1965: Forms Fatah guerrilla movement; two days later attempts first attack on Israel & abortive bombing of water canal in Galilee

Feb 4, 1969: Arafat takes over PLO chairmanship

Sept 6, 1970: PLO faction led by Arafat aide Abu Iyad hijacks three airliners to Jordan, leading Jordanian government to expel PLO to Lebanon, where Arafat builds Palestinian "state within a state"

June 6, 1982: Israel invades Lebanon to crush PLO, forcing Arafat and loyalists to flee Beirut

Dec 12, 1988: Arafat accepts Israel's right to exist, renounces terrorism

Aug 2, 1990: Iraq invades Kuwait; Arafat supports Saddam Hussein,

resulting in PLO's isolation

November 1991: Arafat secretly marries 28-year-old secretary, Suha Tawil, in Tunis. Daughter Zahwa born July 24, 1995, in Paris

July 1, 1994: Arafat sets foot on Palestinian soil for the first time in 26 years

Dec 10, 1994: Arafat wins Nobel Peace Prize

Jan 20, 1996: Arafat elected president of Palestinian Authority in first Palestinian elections

Jan 15, 1997: Arafat and

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu sign accord on Israeli pullout from 80% of West Bank city of Hebron

Oct 23, 1998: Israeli and Palestinian leaders meeting at Wye River, Maryland, agree on interim land-for-peace deal on West Bank

Dec 3, '01: After three suicide bombings, Israel destroys Arafat's three helicopters in Gaza City, confining him to West Bank town of Ramallah

Jan 18, '02: Two Israeli tanks and

armored personnel carrier park outside Arafat's Ramallah headquarters, confining him to office complex after Palestinian gunman bursts into banquet hall



and kills six Israelis

March 29, '02: Israeli Cabinet declares Arafat an "enemy." Troops seize Ramallah, including most of Arafat's headquarters compound

April 2, '02: Arafat, responding to Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon's offer of permanent exile, says he would rather die than leave West Bank

June 24, '02: Siding with Sharon, US President George W Bush calls on Palestinians to replace Arafat as leader

April 29, '03: Palestinian parliament confirms Arafat's deputy, Mahmoud Abbas, as first Palestinian PM;

appointment pushed for by US and Israel in bid to sideline Arafat

Oct 29, '04: Arafat flown to hospital in France with serious, unidentified illness

Nov 11, '04: Arafat dies in France

Natwar to lead Team India

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 11 NOVEMBER

INDIA, on Thursday, paid glowing tributes to Yasser Arafat who died in a Paris hospital in the morning. A high-level delegation headed by external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh left New Delhi in the evening to represent the country at the Palestine leader's funeral in Cairo on Friday. Describing Arafat as an "enduring symbol" of Palestine nationhood, New Delhi said he would be remembered as a "sincere and steadfast friend". India prides itself on being the first non-Arab nation to come out openly in support of the Palestine cause in 1975.

Besides Mr Natwar Singh and his deputy E. Ahamed, the delegation — comprising railway minister Laloo Prasad Yadav, urban development minister Ghulam Nabi Azad and CPI(M) leader Sitaram Yechury — was clearly formed to give out a strong message on India's unwavering support for the Palestine cause.

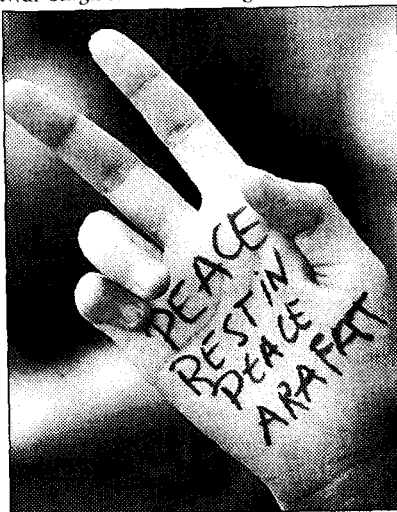
The delegation is expected to return on Friday after attending the last rites. The nation was led by

President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam in paying tributes to the 75-year old leader. Mr Kalam said the Palestinian people had not only lost a great patriot but also a great visionary, whose ambition was to achieve a homeland for his people. Expressing his grief at the death of the leader, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said he would always be remembered as a

"friend and a true patriot". In an official statement, the foreign office said Arafat was "a towering and highly respected international personality who fought selflessly and courageously, at great personal sacrifice for the Palestinian cause and an independent homeland for the Palestinian people, to which he dedicated his whole life".

The inclusion of Mr Yadav in the delegation is being seen as an effort on the part of the RJD leader to send a signal to the minority community in his state, where elections are due next year. Mr Yadav took special pains to obtain per-

mission from the designated CBI court in Ranchi, which has imposed restrictions on his leaving the country in connection with the fodder scam case. The BJP leadership joined hands with the ruling alliance in paying tributes to the Palestine leader.



Suha spars with aides

Plot to bury Arafat: wife

Paris, Nov. 8 (Reuters): Yasser Arafat's wife accused Palestinian leaders today of plotting to "bury him alive", but they decided to go ahead with a visit to the critically ill Palestinian president at a French military hospital.

Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie, foreign minister Nabil Shaath and Palestine Liberation Organisation secretary General Mahmoud Abbas planned to leave the West Bank for Jordan and then go to Paris, a senior Palestinian official said.

Another Palestinian official said they would discuss Arafat's medical condition with senior French officials tomorrow.

Israeli media had reported the 75-year-old president would be taken off life-support equipment after the three leaders had visited him in the hospital's intensive care unit.

The leaders' departure from the West Bank appeared to have been delayed following a scathing verbal attack by Arafat's wife Suha.

"I appeal to you to be aware of the scope of the conspiracy," shouted Suha Arafat,

speaking on Arabic Al Jazeera satellite television and sparking a war of words with loyalists of the three officials.

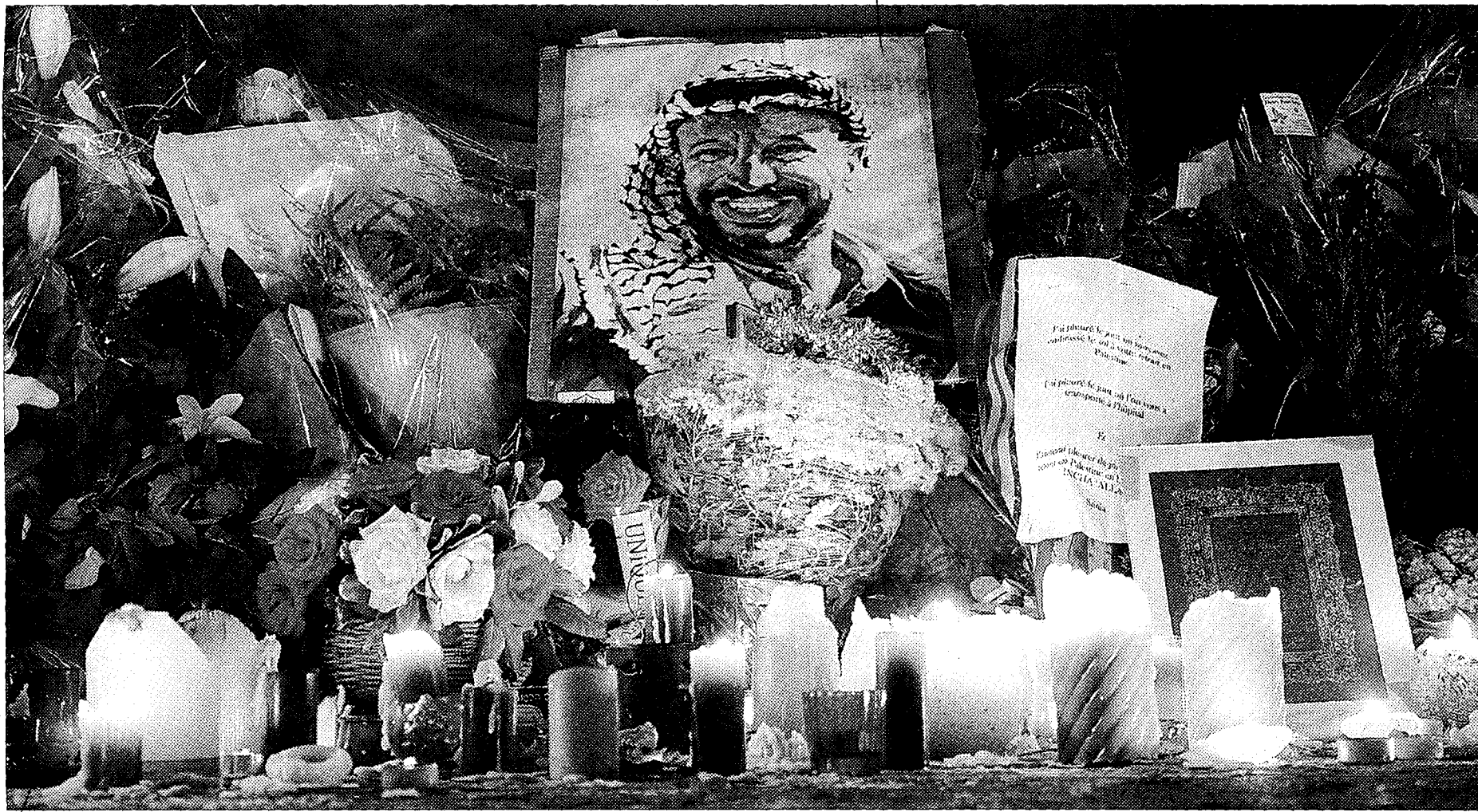
"They are trying to bury Abu Ammar (Arafat) alive," she said in comments that flew in the face of efforts by Arafat's lieutenants to project an image of unity and business as usual at a time when many Palestinians fear chaos if he dies. "Abu Ammar is well and he is coming back to his homeland," she said, accusing the three leaders of being desperate to succeed him.

After her remarks, Palestinian and French officials said the trip from the West Bank had been called off.

But Mohammed Dahlan, a former security chief close to Abbas and an influential leader in Arafat's Fatah faction, said later: "There is no change of plan. The delegation is going to Paris."

Palestinian officials have privately accused Suha Arafat of limiting access to and information about the veteran leader. "We express our utmost regret at the comments made by sister Suha," Qurie said in Ramallah.

Arafat has only hours to live



ONLY PRAYERS Candles and flowers are displayed in front of a portrait of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat outside Percy Military Hospital in the Paris suburb of Clamart on Tuesday.

AFP

Leader slips into deep coma

Agencies
Clamart, November 9

PALESTINIAN LEADER Yasser Arafat has only hours to live, according to unnamed Palestinian officials quoted by news agencies.

Earlier, officials at the hospital near Paris where he is being treated said his condition had worsened and his coma had deepened.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Korei visited his bedside but left the hospital without making a statement.

Doctors have not explained the reasons for his illness. Former Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, who also visited the hospital, said Arafat's condition was "very serious".

Korei is heading a delegation of Palestinian leaders who went to France to discover the truth about Arafat's health. They say information is being filtered by Arafat's wife, Suha, who earlier accused them of conspiring against her husband. Korei, Abbas, Foreign Minister Nabil Shaath and the speaker of Palestinian Legislative Assembly, Rawhi Fattuh, arrived in Paris from Ramallah late on Monday.

They met French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier on Tuesday, and were due to meet French President Jacques Chirac.

Mrs Arafat reportedly said she would not allow the Palestinian officials to visit her husband. The hospital also said that Arafat's condition had compelled them to restrict visiting hours.

Arafat, a frail 75-year-old, was taken to a military hospital in Paris



Policemen escort the cars of Yasser Arafat's top lieutenants, as they arrive at Percy Military Hospital in Clamart on Tuesday.

AFP

11 days ago. Israeli television at one point reported that he was dead. Other reports, rejected by Mrs Arafat, have suggested he is brain dead. Tuesday's announcement about Arafat's condition confirmed for the first time that he was in a coma.

On Monday, the Palestinian officials considered calling off the trip after a verbal attack from Mrs Arafat. In an emotional telephone call to the Arabic TV station, al-Jazeera, she claimed the leaders were trying "to bury Arafat while he is still alive". Deputy cabinet minister Sufian Abu Zaida responded that Arafat was not his

wife's "private property".

Funeral attendance

The US and Europe are not planning to send heads of states to a funeral for Arafat, but rather Cabinet ministers or diplomats, diplomats said on Tuesday. While the leader's health sharply deteriorated on Tuesday, countries were discussing how to pay their respects to a man who was both seen as the father of the Palestinian nation and loathed as a terrorist. It was not immediately clear what plans Arab leaders had for the funeral.

Hamas stakes its claim for power

Agencies
Gaza City, November 9

IT ATTRACTS a large number of faithfuls throughout the year, and their number almost doubles during Ramadan. Welcome to the Taqwa Mosque in northern Gaza City — very much a Hamas territory — on the second last *Jumma* (Friday) of the holy month of the believers.

After the *zohr* (day) prayer, the imam's sermon (*khutba*) was not about Islam but everything to do with politics. Wrapped in his long, grey cloak, he began by asking God for the recovery and safe return of Yasser Arafat. But the rest of his address was filled with a sense that the Arafat era had come to an end — and that it was time for change.

The imam made no direct mention of Hamas. But he talked of the need for those who had stood against Israel — those who had "bled and felt pain" — to have a place in the Palestinian leadership. It was a time for what he described as "men of honour" to come forward.

Hamas is reviled in Israel as the organisation that has killed more than any other with its suicide bombs in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and elsewhere. But to the worshippers at the Taqwa

mosque the Hamas men are heroes of what they see as a fight not just to end the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, but also to drive Israel out of all of what used to be Palestine.

And these young men have contempt for the Palestinian political establishment — which they regard as deeply corrupt. "The Palestinian people want leaders who come from the trenches of the resistance," said one of the worshippers.

Hamas supporters believe that it is time for the organisation to be drawn into the national leadership structure, along with other factions. And the organisation made exactly that demand over the weekend during talks in Gaza with the Palestinian Prime Minister, Ahmed Korei.

One of the top Hamas men in the Gaza Strip, Ismael Haniya, spelt out what the group wants. It wants a joint leadership established that would give Hamas and other factions a say in decision-making. This new body would oversee the situation until elections could be held. Analysts in Gaza believe that Korei and Abbas might accept a role for Hamas and other factions in some sort of advisory forum. But they are unlikely to agree to a body that would have real decision-making powers.

STRENGTHENING INDO-US RELATIONS

PM unfazed by Left reservations

Press Trust of India

ON BOARD PM's SPECIAL AIRCRAFT, Nov. 7. — Dr Manmohan Singh today brushed aside the Left parties reservation on strengthening India's relationship with the USA saying "international realities" have to be taken into account for mutual advantage.

"We have to recognise that the USA is a super power. The interests of India and the USA may not always coincide. But I still believe there is enormous scope for constructive engagement with the US which will be to our mutual advantage," he told reporters accompanying him to The Hague.

Asked about the Left parties objection to his writing a letter to Mr George W Bush congratulating him on his re-election and his hopes for a stronger relationship between the two countries, he said: "We have to take realities of the world into account. International rela-

'EU call for partnership welcome'

NEW DELHI, Nov. 7. — Dr Manmohan Singh has welcomed the European Union's proposal to enter into a strategic partnership with India. The partnership will be adopted after the one-day summit at the Hague tomorrow. The Netherlands currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU and the summit will be hosted by the Dutch Prime Minister, Mr Jan Balkenende.

"In recognition of India's growing stature and influence, the EU has proposed a strategic partnership with India. This will be formalised during the Hague summit. We warmly welcome the development," he said in a statement today before leaving for The Hague. Europe, he said, was an important political and strategic factor on international scene and the EU had enlarged its membership to 25 members from 15 members erasing fault lines that divided the continent for over half a century. — SNS

tions are decided on the basis of power. We are living in a world of unequal power. We can't wish away reality. We have to fight within the international system to promote our interests. Our effort is to strengthen our dialogue on the basis of our position." He said the telephonic talk he had with Mr Bush was initiated after consultations between both sides. "I think it was a simple courtesy," he said.

Dr Singh said he did not foresee any hiccups on fur-

thering the Indo-US initiatives that were on. Asked on the impact of Mr Bush's re-election on the possibility of a multi-polar world, he said: "We have always believed that we must work to evolve an order in which interests of all countries are taken into account."

On the nuclear stand-off involving Iran, he said Iran must honour all its international obligations to which it is a party and it was India's hopes that this could be resolved within the framework of IAEA.

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THE STATESMAN

Israel nod to Gaza burial

Agencies

Jerusalem, November 7

ISRAEL HAS completed preparations for the ailing Yasser Arafat to be buried in the Gaza Strip, outlining plans to allow West Bank Palestinians to cross through Israel for the funeral and permitting enemy Arab leaders to attend, security officials said today.

The decision, announced by Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz in a Cabinet meeting, was the latest development in the battle over Arafat's burial. With the Palestinian leader's condition increasingly dire, where to bury him has become a sensitive issue.

Palestinian officials have said Arafat wants to be buried in Jerusalem. Israel rejects that demand, citing security concerns and fearing it would strengthen Palestinian claims to the traditionally Arab sector of the city as a future capital.

Israeli officials have suggested Gaza as an alternative, but say they will consider Palestinian wishes for burial elsewhere. They said they have not been contacted by the Palestinians.

Palestinian Cabinet minister Saeb Erekat said it is inappropriate to discuss the burial issue while Arafat is alive. "I think it's not for the Israelis to de-



REUTERS

A man holds up a portrait of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat outside the Percy Military Hospital in Clamart near Paris on Sunday.

cide and I would urge the Israelis to show some sensitivity," Erekat said.

Arafat, 75, remained in the intensive care unit of a French military hospital today, with new confusion about his condition. Palestinian officials have said in recent days that he is in a coma. But Nabil Abu Rdeneh, a senior Arafat aide, said today he was not comatose, only "sleeping.

Transfer to Cairo

Palestinian officials are considering transferring their ailing leader Yasser

Arafat to a hospital in Cairo from a French military hospital where he is being treated for an undiagnosed problem.

Aides to the Palestinian Chairman said his condition was "so bad" that he might be moved to Egypt from where he could be flown home quickly in case he died.

"One option being considered is moving him to Cairo," a Palestinian official in the West Bank who did not want to be named was quoted as saying by Israeli daily *Haaretz*.

Former security chief

Mohammad Dahlan, who was scheduled to return to Ramallah from Paris today to update senior officials in the PA on Arafat's health, has delayed his return to later next week. Early today, Dahlan refused to divulge details on the veteran's health to the media but insisted that his brain wasn't dead and that he was not connected to life support machines, the Radio said.

Amid conflicting claims, Palestinian officials in Ramallah also reportedly said yesterday that the doctors at the French military hospital were waiting for permission from Arafat's wife, Suha, to disconnect him from life supporting machines.

"President Arafat remains in critical condition and unconscious," a senior official is quoted as saying.

"Unfortunately, there has been no change in his health condition. The decision is now in the hands of Suha," he added.

Officials at Percy have refused to hold any more press briefings regarding Arafat's condition. The hospital said that from now on Suha can relate messages to the press herself, or send a representative to do so, *al-Arabiya* reported yesterday. PA Minister for Negotiations Saeb Erekat yesterday denied reports that Arafat's brain was dead and that he was on life support.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Arafat hangs 'between life and death'

Reuters
Paris, November 5

YASSER ARAFAT is in a coma between life and death, a senior Palestinian official says.

The 75-year-old leader — symbol for decades of the Palestinian struggle against Israel for a state — was in an intensive care unit at a French military hospital, but the exact nature of his illness remained unclear.

"Today we can say that Yasser Arafat in his state of health and at his age is at a critical juncture between life and death," Leila Shahid, the permanent Palestinian envoy to Paris, told French RTL radio on Friday.

"I assure you that he is not brain dead," she said. "He is in a coma. We are not sure what type. But it is a reversible coma."

Shahid ruled out the possibility of Arafat resigning as president of the Palestinian Authority. "There is no reason. Why resign? ... Palestinian institutions provide for a vice-president for all the posts held by Yasser Arafat, and the vice-presidents will take over if need be."

A senior Palestinian offi-



LIGHT OF HOPE A supporter of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat lights a candle in front of the French military Percy hospital in Clamart, south of Paris, on Friday.

cial said Prime Minister Ahmed Korei, a leading moderate, had taken over some of Arafat's powers for security and financing.

Arafat has not named a successor and had earlier been reluctant to cede any powers.

CNN quoted US officials as saying Arafat was on a life support machine, but no independent confirmation was available. It said French, Egyptian, Palestinian and Israeli officials were involved in possible burial arrangements.

Israeli and Palestinian political sources have said Arafat would probably be laid to rest in Gaza because Israel refuses him a grave in Jerusalem.

A small group of Arafat supporters spent the night in front of the hospital in the southwest Paris suburb of Clamart, holding Palestinian flags and keeping dozens of candles alight on the pavement. French President Jacques Chirac visited Arafat on Thursday afternoon.

Palestinians locked in a 4-year-old uprising against

Israel were fearful his death could trigger a power vacuum and chaos.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestinians were glued to radio and television broadcasts. "Dear God protect our leader, dear God protect our father," chanted gunmen from Arafat's Fatah faction, firing shots in the air as they joined crowds in Gaza's streets.

Security has been boosted at Jewish settlements in the West Bank for fear of mass violence against them, Israeli TV said.