

Israel strikes Palestinian militant base in Lebanon

Three Britons kidnapped in Gaza; guerillas occupy election offices



FIREFIGHT: Palestinian police officers during an exchange of fire with Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades gunmen outside an election office in Gaza City on Wednesday. — PHOTO: AP

BEIRUT: Israeli jets blasted a Palestinian militant group's base in Lebanon early on Wednesday, lightly wounding two guerrillas, hours after rockets hit a northern Israeli border town.

In their deepest strike into Lebanon in 18 months, the Israeli planes attacked a base south of Beirut of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, a small, Syrian-backed group that has been fighting the Jewish state for decades.

Retaliation

"This is in response to the firing of projectile rockets last night toward Israeli communities," the Israeli military said, referring to the attack on the

northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona that damaged property but did not inflict casualties.

Meanwhile in Gaza, three British citizens were kidnapped as they entered the Gaza Strip from Egypt through the Rafah crossing on Wednesday, Palestinian witnesses and security officials said.

The incident was the latest in a series of abductions in Gaza that has undermined Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas' attempts to establish order in the coastal strip following Israel's withdrawal this summer.

Security officials in Gaza said one of the victims is a human rights worker but had no further details. There was no immediate claim of responsibility. Palesti-

nian security spokesman Adnan Barbach confirmed that the three are British citizens.

Fatah factions unite

In other incidents, dozens of masked gunmen took over election offices in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, exchanging fire with Palestinian police and demanding spaces on a list for January 25 parliamentary elections.

The clashes came hours before a Wednesday afternoon deadline for submitting the list and as Fatah's two main factions — the so-called "young" and "old" guards — announced an end to an internal rift that had threatened to bolster the electoral prospects of the militant Ha-

mas. After intense negotiations, young guard members said Fatah will submit a single, unified list for the elections.

More than 60 gunmen stormed the main election office, exchanging fire with some 500 security forces who rushed to the scene, surrounding the building and setting up roadblocks. One policeman was wounded in the leg by gunfire and whisked away in an ambulance.

In Khan Younis and Deir el-Balah, gunmen made it into the buildings.

Some of the gunmen were fighting for slots in the Fatah candidates' list; others were demanding jobs in the Palestinian security forces. — AP, AFP

Anti-Syria MP killed in Beirut car blast

Beirut: A car bomb killed Lebanese newspaper magnate and anti-Syrian lawmaker **Gebran Tueni** in



Beirut on Monday, a day after he returned from Paris, where he had based himself in recent months in fear of assassination.

Several Lebanese politicians immediately blamed Syria, which has denied any role and said the killing was timed to smear it.

dom of the Levant" claimed responsibility for the killing in a statement, saying the same fate awaited other opponents of 'Arabism' in Lebanon.

There was no way to verify the authenticity of the claim, whose wording appeared designed to cast suspicion on Damascus.

Security sources said a parked car packed with up to 100 kg of dynamite was detonated by remote control as Tueni's car passed by. Tueni's car was hurled from the road and landed in a different street dozens of metres away.



Siham Tueni, wife of slain Lebanese anti-Syrian journalist and MP Gebran Tueni, reacts at the site of the blast

Police said Tueni, publisher of An Nahar daily, was among four people killed in the explosion that destroyed his armoured sports utility vehicle as it was driving in the Mekalis area of mainly Christian east Beirut. Some 32 people were wounded. The bodies of Tueni, 48, his driver and a bodyguard were found in his car, charred beyond recognition. Assault rifles and military bags laid beside them inside the wrecked vehicle.

A previously unknown group calling itself "Strugglers for the Unity and Free-

Tueni was killed just hours before the UN Security Council was due to receive a report by chief UN investigator Detlev Mehlis, who has been trying to identify those behind the Feb 14 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al Hariri.

The US embassy in Beirut condemned the killing, saying in a statement that "with this heinous act, the forces of oppression and tyranny have taken from the Lebanese people one of their greatest champions for liberty and freedom..." Reuters

Israel denies Iran attack plans

Associated Press

JERUSALEM, Dec. 11. — Israel denied a British report today that Israel has plans to attack Iran in March, though officials conceded that they would not rule out a military strike if Iran advances in efforts to develop nuclear weapons.

The angry reaction came in response to a report in London's *Sunday Times* that said Israel has a plan for a combined air and ground attack on targets in Iran if diplomacy fails to stop the Iranian nuclear program. Mr Sharon's inner Cabinet authorised the attack in a

Defence minister to join Sharon

TEL AVIV, Dec. 11. — Defence minister Mr Shaul Mofaz delivered a new blow to Israel's Likud party today by defecting to Mr Ariel Sharon's new Kadima movement and accusing his old colleagues of veering towards extremism.

Mr Mofaz had been running for leadership of the right-wing party which has dominated Israeli politics for the last three decades. But with polls giving him no chance of succeeding the prime minister at the helm of Likud, Mr Mofaz announced that he was rejoining his political mentor after being reportedly offered the chance to retain his post if Sharon is re-elected. "Events of the last few weeks have brought me to the painful conclusion that the Likud is drifting away from me and turning to the extreme right. This is not my way," Mr Mofaz said. — AFP

meeting last month, the Iran through diplomatic newspaper said.

Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon's national security adviser, Mr Giora Eitland, dismissed the report as "unfounded speculation." "Israel is acting against the greatest threat to the

Jewish state and rejects Iran's claims that its nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes. Recent calls by Iranian President Mr Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to "wipe Israel off the map" and move the Jewish state to Europe have only added to those concerns.

"Israel can't live in a situation in which Iran has the atomic bomb," foreign minister Mr Silvan Shalom said today. Prime Minister Mr Ariel Sharon has said Israel won't lead the international battle against the Iranian nuclear program, and officials say all diplomatic means must be exhausted before military action is considered.

A senior defence ministry official said today that Israel hasn't ruled out a military strike if Teheran advances with its nuclear program.

West Bank unrest

A militant from Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades was killed by his own bomb during clashes in the northern West Bank early today, as the Israeli army arrested 17 Palestinians, most of them militants. In the Balata refugee camp near Nablus, 19-year-old Iyyad Hashash from Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades was killed after a bomb he was trying to throw at troops backfired adds AFP from Nablus.

12 DEC 2005

EU heat on Iran leader

to Ahmadinejad

Berlin, Dec. 9 (Reuters): Germany, Russia and Switzerland joined the EU today in a chorus of condemnation of the Iranian President for suggesting the Holocaust might not have taken place and that Israel should be moved to Europe.

The remarks by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, at a news conference in the Saudi Arabian city of Mecca yesterday, follow his call in October for Israel to be "wiped off the map", which also sparked broad international criticism.

The German foreign ministry said it had summoned Iran's ambassador to protest, and ministry spokesman Martin Jaeger said this was being done to show how seriously Berlin was taking the comments.

"When one summons an ambassador, then you signal the start of something in diplomacy, that there are grounds for serious discussion," Jaeger said.

Iran's official news agency Irna quoted Ahmadinejad as saying of the Nazi Holocaust: "Some European countries insist on saying that Hitler killed millions of innocent Jews in furnaces..."

"Although we don't accept this claim, if we suppose it is true, our question for the Eu-

ropeans is: is the killing of innocent Jewish people by Hitler the reason for their support to the occupiers of Jerusalem?" he said.

"If the Europeans are honest they should give some of their provinces in Europe — like in Germany, Austria or other countries — to the Zionists and the Zionists can establish their state in Europe."

Britain, which currently holds the rotating EU presidency and has played a key role in European attempts to persuade Tehran to give up its nuclear ambitions, said such comments had "no place in civilised political debate".

"Iran is unique in opposing a resolution to the Arab-Israel dispute based on the principle of two states living side by side in peace and security," foreign secretary Jack Straw said. The Russian foreign ministry said: "It is difficult to comment on such unacceptable remarks."

ON ISRAEL ■ 'The Europeans should give some of their provinces to the Zionists...we will support it'

Ahmadinejad casts doubt on Holocaust

PAUL HUGHES
TEHRAN, DECEMBER 9

IRANIAN president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Thursday expressed doubt that the Holocaust took place and suggested the Jewish state of Israel be moved to Europe.

His comments, reported by Iran's official IRNA news agency from a news conference he gave in the Saudi Arabian city of Mecca, provoked quick condemnation. German Chancellor Angela Merkel called them "totally unacceptable" and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said: "I condemn them unreservedly. They have no place in civilised political debate."

Ahmadinejad was quoted by IRNA as saying: "Some European countries insist on saying that Hitler killed mil-

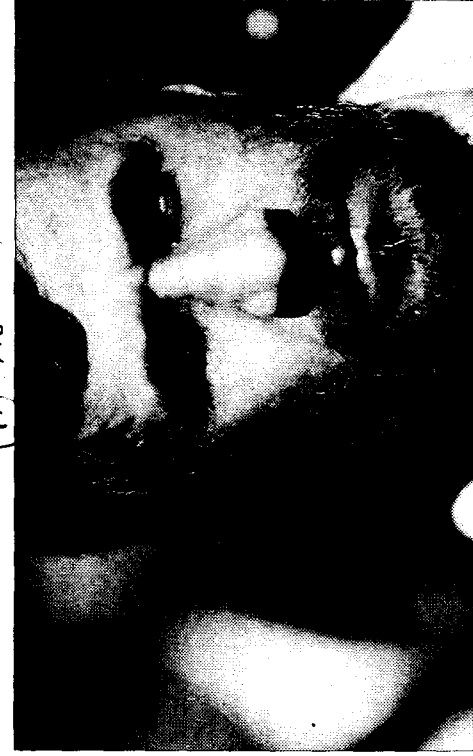
lions of innocent Jews in furnaces and they insist on it to the extent that if anyone proves something contrary to that they condemn that person and throw them in jail.

"Although we don't accept this claim, if we suppose it is true, our question for the Europeans is: is the killing of innocent Jewish people by Hitler the reason for their support to the occupiers of Jerusalem?" he said.

"If the Europeans are honest they should give some of their provinces in Europe—like in Germany, Austria or other countries—to the Zionists and the Zionists can establish their state in Europe. You offer part of Europe and we will support it."

Ahmadinejad's remarks drew swift rebukes from Israel and Washington.

Raanan Gissin, a spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, said in Tel Aviv that Ahmadinejad was



voicing "the consensus that exists in many circles in the Arab world that the Jewish people ... do not have the right to establish a Jewish, democratic state in their ancestral homeland.

"Just to remind Mr. Ahmadinejad,

we've been here long before his ancestors were here," Gissin said. "Therefore, we have a birthright to be here in the land of our forefathers and to live here. Thank God we have the capability to deter and to prevent such

a statement from becoming a reality."

Deputy US State Department spokesman Adam Ereli called the remarks "appalling and reprehensible".

"They certainly don't inspire hope among any of us in the international community that the government in Iran is prepared to engage as a responsible member of the community," he said.

A news conference with French President Jacques Chirac near Berlin, Merkel also said: "With our historical responsibility in mind, I can only say that we reject them (Ahmadinejad's comments) in the harshest possible terms. We will do everything to make

it clear that Israel's right to existence is in no way endangered. I am firmly convinced that a majority in the international community has a similar opinion on this issue," she said. Chirac said he agreed completely. —Reuters

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Political change in Israel

Those who claim to be 'centrists' in Israeli politics appear to have gained an edge over their rivals after Labour leader Shimon Peres ended his decades-long association with the party and announced his support for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the forthcoming parliamentary election. Mr. Peres has not clarified whether he will join the political party 'Kadima' (Forward) that Mr. Sharon formed after he quit Likud in late November. However, it is virtually guaranteed that Mr. Peres will find a place in the cabinet if the Sharon-led coalition forms a government. While sceptics might think it was the fear of losing ministerial rank that led the 82-year-old Labourite to switch camps, he seems to have done so for more complex reasons. Those who are aware of Mr. Sharon's record of brutal aggression against the Arabs might be surprised that he is being described as a centrist. But the violent conflict with the Palestinians over the five years of the second *intifada* has had its impact on Israeli politics. Realists have come to realise that the Zionist state cannot continue to suppress the people of the occupied territories. They believe the time has come for Israel to withdraw behind well-defined borders and arrive at a 'two-State' solution to the long-standing conflict. With Mr. Sharon emerging as the foremost votary of this line of thinking, 'doves' such as Mr. Peres evidently felt that they needed to strengthen his hand.

Public opinion polls suggest Kadima could emerge as the largest party in a newly elected Knesset. With Labour also expected to make substantial gains, there is a good chance that diehard Likudniks opposed to a territorial settlement with the Palestinians will be pushed to the margins of Israeli politics. While the prospects of a 'two-State' solution seem to have brightened at this juncture, it is difficult to outline the contours of a final peace agreement. Mr. Sharon appears intent on annexing to Israel the larger blocks of Zionist colonies in the West Bank, even as he carries out withdrawal from the rest of the occupied territory. He also appears determined to implement his plan in unilateralist fashion, without consulting the Palestinian Authority. The new leader of the Labour party, Amir Peretz, promises a more enlightened solution. He has long maintained that the resources deployed in providing subsidised housing in the West Bank colonies should instead be used for developing backward pockets within Israel. Mr. Peretz, who is of Moroccan descent, has been a trade union leader for many years and is considered Old Labour. He is expected to attract support from the country's sullen underclass. However, the signs are that the issue of 'national security' will be at the top of the mind of most Israeli voters. Mr. Peretz's promise of economic justice combined with a just peace might not be quite enough to tilt the scales in the coming election.

Tension high in the final round of polls in Egypt

W. Aneja
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Banned Islamist organisation makes huge electoral gains

Atul Aneja

DUBAI: Egyptian voters have cast their ballots in the final round of parliamentary polls amid tensions following the arrest of hundreds of members of the Opposition Muslim Brotherhood.

Candidates of the banned Islamist group have been participating not under their party's banner, but as individuals. Nevertheless, the group appears to have been subjected to a fresh crackdown, after its candidates began to fare relatively well in the earlier rounds of voting.

Ruling party ahead

The Brotherhood has claimed that more than 500 of its members have been detained in the last two days. The arrests, it alleged, took place in the governorates where Thursday's elections were contested.

The Government, however, has denied any knowledge of the detentions. More than 10 million Egyptians were eligible to vote in Thursday's third and final round, where 136 seats in the 454-member Parliament were contested. The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) of President Hosni Mubarak has already won 201 seats, and is expected have a majority in the new Parliament.

The Muslim Brotherhood has won 76 seats in the first two rounds



INDOMITABLE SPIRIT: Voters climb into a polling station in Bosat, north of Cairo, on Thursday as it was blocked by anti-riot police during the parliamentary vote. — PHOTO: AP

— a five-fold increase from its present strength in Parliament. It has led a welfare-oriented campaign under the slogan, "Islam is the solution". It has demonstrated its grass-

roots support in a country where NDP has been the dominant political force by far.

Reports of voting irregularities had begun to emerge, when poll

monitors said that the polling during the second round on Saturday last had been marred by clashes between rival political groups, intimidation and fraud.

Islam and social needs converge in Egypt

Many of those who voted for the Muslim Brotherhood say it's not just religion.

Michael Slackman

WHEN THE Muslim Brotherhood says, "Islam is the Solution," Osama Imam hopes they are talking about unemployment. Muhammad Lotfi hopes they are talking about getting fresh running water into his home. Kinawy Essam hopes they are talking about opening a youth centre in Mazghouna, a poor village, where the roads are unpaved, children run barefoot through dusty, litter-strewn streets, and dozens of young men mill around run-down coffee houses because there are no jobs.

But they were not, they say, voting for an Islamic caliphate.

"We voted for the one who can make a change," Ali Rifaat, 25, said Monday, adding that had backed a Muslim Brotherhood candidate out of frustration at the stagnation of life in his village.

In a development that surprised even its own leaders, the Muslim Brotherhood won 76 seats in the first two rounds of parliamentary elections, including one in Mazghouna where a member of the group defeated a candidate from the governing National Democratic Party. With one more round of voting to go in December, the Brotherhood has established itself as the chief opposition to President Hosni Mubarak's governing National Democratic Party.

But while the essence of the Brotherhood's platform is a religious one, and its campaign relied heavily on the slogan "Islam is the Solution," people in Mazghouna, an hour south of Cairo, said over and over that they had voted for the Brotherhood because they did not believe the governing party was committed to change. The religious component of the Brotherhood's message was important to some, but in more than a dozen interviews on Monday, often held among crowds of people, everyone said that what was important was tangible improvement to their lives.

"We voted for many people over the years, and they did nothing for us," said Lotfi, 31, a driver who said he was tired of having to constantly bribe the local traffic police in order to avoid troubles. "Now, we want the Brotherhood. Maybe they will do something for the people, for the youth. The water here is not even drinkable."

There are about 15,000 people in Mazghouna, a village that runs along one of the fetid canals channelling water off the Nile River.

The main street is a rutted dirt road bordered by two-story brick houses. Women lug large metal bowls and plastic containers down narrow dark alleys to pump water out of the ground for use at home.

This is the village that voted to oust a

two-term incumbent, Essam Aboul Magd, a member of the National Democratic Party, and replace him with an imam, Ahmed Abdo Shabun, a longtime member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Mr. Shabun, 46, is a short man with a neatly trimmed black beard who is not a stranger to the villagers.

They know him as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood who for years has worked with a legal charitable organisation distributing money to the poor and providing social services to the needy. For many years, he also preached at local mosques run by the same charity, before the government blocked him.

The Brotherhood is an illegal organisation, but the charity Mr. Shabun worked for was not — and so as other members have done around the country, he won support for his organisation and his cause by legally providing services that the government failed to provide.

"They help us get what we need," said Abdel Tawab Salem, 46, who said he had six young children but had not had a permanent job since 1986.

Mr. Salem said he had voted for Mr. Shabun because his organisation had been a part of his life, unlike that of the departing governing party member. "I never used to see him," he said.

Mr. Shabun, who says the first priority is

to bring clean drinking water to the people in the 19 villages he will represent, is however, very focussed on the religious component of his group's agenda. It will be difficult for him to pursue it, so long as the National Democratic Party continues to control a commanding majority of Parliament. But it is very much on his mind.

"This is an Islamic state; we can't say otherwise," Mr. Shabun said. "But it is not always following the Islam God ordained. Some ideas have to be adjusted."

He wants to ban the sale of alcohol: "I would not encourage it, but if tourists want to drink, they can bring it with them."

He wants to do away with interest payments on money: "I would abolish bank interest and introduce Islamic banking."

But out on the street, where many of Mr. Shabun's future constituents walk about idly, there was little emphasis on religious ideas. "I want change," Adel Sabagh, 34, a farmer, said as he led his white donkey down the main street of town.

"I voted for the Brotherhood for change. The other was here for 10 years and did nothing."

There were some who emphasised a religious motivation for picking the Brotherhood, but even with them the religious was often intertwined with the temporal. —New York Times News Service

Rafah in Palestinian control

REUTERS

Rafah (Gaza Strip), November 26

PALESTINIANS ASSERTED control for the first time over an international frontier on Saturday as hundreds of Gazans moved across a newly opened terminal at Rafah into neighbouring Egypt.

Travellers exchanged embraces and some flashed V-for victory signs, happy to be freer to travel and to be processed by Palestinian police rather than Israeli soldiers who occupied the Gaza Strip for 38 years before they withdrew in September.

"I feel free and happy as a bird with 10 wings," said Jihad Zanoun, 29, the first Palestinian to have his passport stamped at the Rafah terminal formally opened in a ribbon-cutting ceremony a day earlier. Israel had barred Zanoun from leaving Gaza for three years citing security concerns.

Hundreds of Palestinians, some who had slept there for days, crowded the grounds where buses took them in groups of about 60 to the terminal. Dozens also poured in from Egypt back to Gaza.

About 20 European police monitors were on hand, standing or sitting with the Palestinian officials under a deal brokered by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to reopen Gaza and provide a crucial lifeline to its people and economy.

The Rafah crossing had been largely shut since Israel's exit from coastal Gaza, due to Israeli security concerns.

Under the deal Israeli officials would watch the crossing alongside



A Palestinian protests against the just four-hour opening at the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza on Saturday.

Palestinians via video-link to a nearby monitoring station in southern Israel, looking out for suspected militants or any attempts to smuggle in weapons.

Pietro Pistolesse, who heads the European Union monitors, said because the terminal was running smoothly, it would be open for five hours on Sunday, up from four hours on Saturday.

The crossing is due to open full time only after all 70 European Union inspectors arrive, probably by mid-December.

The Rafah deployment marks the

terminal grounds, most travellers there were all smiles.

During years of Israeli occupation, passengers would have to queue for hours as Israeli security personnel searched their belongings and questioned them.

Now many passed through in a matter of minutes.

"It moved like lightning. The procedure is so easy. This is the first time I have travelled in freedom and without fear," said Ibrahim An-Nahal, a physician from Rafah who said Israelis would often take hours to question him or check his passport.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas formally opened the terminal on Friday by cutting a ribbon and saying: "I think every Palestinian now has his passport ready in his pocket. Let them come to cross at this terminal whenever they want."

Big win for Barghouti-led guard

The young guard, led by jailed popular Palestinian leader Marwan Barghouti, has swept the primaries of the ruling Fatah party, held in the West Bank cities to decide the party list for the forthcoming Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections in January. The Elections Committee said the young Palestinian icon bagged 96 per cent of the votes polled in Ramallah.

The voter turnout was approximately 60 per cent. The victory means Barghouti could be placed at a high spot on the Fatah list ahead of the upcoming Palestinian general elections, and could possibly capture the top spot.

EU's first monitoring role in the Palestinian territories.

EU sees 'friendly atmosphere'

Pistolesse told reporters the terminal would "open a link between the Gaza Strip and other countries", and he hoped it would operate in a "friendly atmosphere".

European and Palestinian officials said they hoped to process upwards of 400 people a day. Though that meant an extra wait for some of 2,000 Palestinians who packed the

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PRINTS

Handwritten: VV Palestine opens Gaza-Egypt border

ASSOCIATED Press
Rafah Terminal (Gaza Strip).
November 25

OFFICIALS OPENED the Gaza-Egypt border with a festive ceremony on Friday — a milestone for the Palestinians who for the first time took control of a frontier crossing without Israeli veto powers and gained some freedom of movement.

The opening was seen as a step toward Palestinian independence and a boost for Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, as he faces a fierce challenge by the Islamic militant Hamas in a January 25 parliamentary election.

"This is a great day. It is a day of happiness ... because it means an enormous step forward toward the freedom of the Palestinian people," said Marc Otte, the European Union representative in the Middle East.

Abbas inaugurated the terminal by cutting a ribbon in front of 1,200 guests, then toured the refurbished facility.

He also announced a major security clampdown in the West Bank and Gaza, saying the Palestinians must end the lawlessness in their territories to spur economic recovery and revive peacemaking.



AFP

Palestinians wait for their turn to cross over into Egypt at the Rafah Terminal on Friday.

Abbas reiterated that the election would be held on time, dispelling rumors he would seek a delay because of disarray in his Fatah party, which held primaries in some districts Friday.

The Rafah terminal on the Gaza-Egypt had been closed by Israel as its troops withdrew from the Gaza Strip in September. After two months of international mediation and a final push by US

secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, Israel agreed that the Palestinians would run their side of the border, with the help of European monitors.

The crossing will open to Palestinian travellers on Saturday, initially for four hours a day until the European monitors get settled. After the test period, opening hours will be expanded.

"From this moment, we feel

we're free," said Fathia Najjar (55), one of a group of Palestinian travellers waiting near Rafah to cross the next day. "Before this, we lived in a jail."

Before the Israeli pullout, travel through Rafah was often difficult. The terminal was repeatedly closed on security grounds, and at times travellers waited for days to get through.

Heavy security ringed the ter-

ritorial during Friday's ceremony, with police setting up roadblocks on access roads. Police officers also lined the main north-south road from Gaza City to Rafah.

The border deal backs Abbas' message that Palestinians can only gain independence through negotiations with Israel. Hamas says such talks are pointless and that it drove Israel out of Gaza by force.

Despite the Abbas-Hamas rivalry, Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar attended the opening ceremony. "Our presence here does not mean we support this agreement," the Hamas leader said.

In preparation for the opening, the terminal was painted, workers replaced ceiling tiles and installed new lighting. Rows of blue and orange chairs filled the arrivals and departure halls, along with batteries of computers, X-ray machines, metal detectors and security cameras.

The key dispute between Israel and the Palestinians had been over whether Israel should get real time surveillance videos from Rafah and be allowed to veto the entry or departure of some passengers. In the end, Israel dropped both demands.

Otte, the EU representative, said the operation of the terminal would be a test for renewed Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, after nearly five years of bloody fighting.

Initially, 20 EU monitors will supervise Rafah operations, said Julio Delaguardia, spokesman for the contingent. He said he hoped all monitors would be in place within a month, to handle large crowds for an upcoming pilgrimage season to Saudi Arabia.

Sharon's gamble

Israel awaits the Ides of March

Ariel Sharon's dramatic exit from the Likud Party, that he founded more than three decades ago, will have a profound impact on Israeli politics. Two crucial developments have almost coincided with his resignation, which has clearly shaken the party to its foundations. Elections have been advanced to March with the dissolution of the Knesset. Notably, an incumbent Prime Minister will now lead a breakaway party to the polls... for the first time in Israel and perhaps anywhere else in the world. The other development is that Sharon has floated his own supposedly liberal outfit, styled National Responsibility. A truncated Likud, which will very probably be led by Benjamin Netanyahu, will now consist of his opponents, aka enemies of a Palestinian state, who had always wanted to see him out, more so after the Gaza pullout a few months ago. The immediate provocation was the refusal of the Rightist bloc within Likud to accept his ministerial appointments. Sharon's remarks as he took the bow on Tuesday sounded almost as a dirge for the party he founded in 1973 — "The Likud in its present configuration cannot lead the nation to its goals."

That goal is primarily the peace process. There is little doubt that Sharon has taken a very big political risk. And should the gamble pay off with victory in the election, the peace process ought to get a tremendous boost. On his part, he has ruled out further unilateral disengagements from the West Bank and has pledged to stick to what they call an internationally-agreed Road Map. Public opinion is said to be in his favour, and he has reasons to be confident even in terms of numbers. Pledges of support have come from as many as 14 Likud members, including four senior ministers. This is one-third of the party's present strength in the Knesset. The biggest gamble of his career may just pay off.

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An end to 'Greater Israel'?

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Israeli politics has been thrown into turmoil with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon resigning from the Likud party and asking President Moshe Katsav to dissolve parliament. Mr. Sharon was one of the founders of the party that has been the leading right-wing force for almost 30 years. For most of that period, he was also considered the country's leading hawk, although as a Minister he had supervised the dismantling of Zionist settlements in the Sinai Peninsula following the 1978 Camp David Agreement with Egypt. This was mainly because Mr. Sharon was an ardent advocate of the 'Greater Israel' policy that successive Likud Governments tried to implement. This was a project for the permanent annexation of all the territory between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean. Had it fructified, the Palestinians could at best have aspired to a measure of autonomy in civic and social affairs. The 'bulldozer' of Zionist politics has now signalled a decisive break with the 'Greater Israel' lobby. While announcing his plans to form a new party, Mr. Sharon let it be known that he intends finally to settle his country's borders if returned to power. This is code for a territorial settlement with the Palestinians. Public pronouncements about such a change have been rare, although the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip earlier this year indicated as much. It would be unrealistic to think that the hawk has shed its talons. There is no sign that the unilateralist effort to dictate the terms and extent of any withdrawal from the occupied territory will be abandoned if a Sharon-led formation returns to power. For all that, the parting of ways between centrist Likudniks and the zealots and opportunists in the party is a positive development.

While Mr. Sharon has tried to portray his decision to break with the Likud as one based on principle, raw politics appears to have as much to do with it. The writing was on the wall once the newly installed leader of the Labour Party, Amir Peretz, asked his Ministers to resign from the Sharon cabinet. Likud 'rebels', who oppose even the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and four isolated enclaves in the West Bank, command a majority in the party's central committee. With Mr. Sharon no longer in a position to claim that he was the sole Likudnik who could draw support from other political formations, there was no place for him in the party leadership. Other party heavyweights, such as former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, appear to have realised that they cannot rig up another coalition in the Knesset as it is currently composed. The parties of religious extremists apparently do not have strength sufficient to prop up a government. With Likud and Labour representatives already engaged in talks to settle the date for the next election to the Knesset, Israeli voters might soon have an opportunity to reorient their country's policies. The fervent hope is that they will vote for peace and justice.

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In tune with the people

Ariel Sharon took the biggest gamble of his political career by walking out of the party he formed a generation ago and abandoning it to the diehard opponents of a Palestinian state who wanted to oust him.

Mr Sharon precipitated the most seismic shift in Israeli politics since he was the architect of Likud's foundation in 1973 by announcing on Monday that he was launching a new "National Responsibility" breakaway party of the centre to fight elections in less than four months time.

In a final break with his past as the standard-bearer of Israel's political Right, Mr Sharon's departure from Likud dealt a massive blow to the party. But it also threw up a series of unpredictable post-election scenarios — including the once-unthinkable possibility of a coalition between himself and the new Labour leader Amir Peretz which could edge to ending conflict with the Palestinians.

Mr Sharon confirmed that the refusal of the hard-Right Likud opponents of his pullout from Gaza to accept his ministerial appointments last month had been the final factor in his decision to form a new "liberal" party.

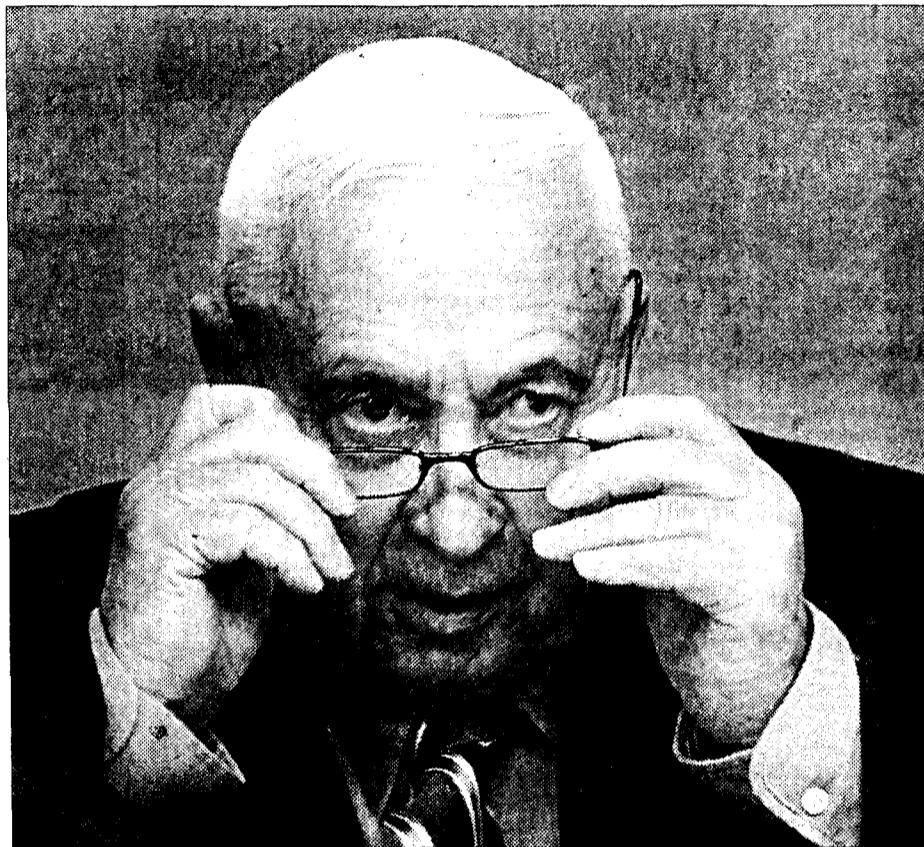
As the Knesset voted by a large majority to dissolve itself and precipitate an election in March, Mr Sharon declared: "The Likud in its present configuration cannot lead the nation to its goals." He added that "staying in the Likud would have meant wasting time with politics instead of working for the good of the nation. I prefer the good of the nation over comfort and ease."

By last night, Mr Sharon had secured the support of 14 Likud members in the Knesset — a third of the parliamentary party's members for his new breakaway. The figure is financially as well as psychologically important because it is the minimum required to qualify for state funding as a bona fide new party.

While the supporters include four senior ministers, led by his close ally the finance minister Ehud Olmert, they do not include Shaul Mofaz, the defence minister who declared on Sunday night that he would run for the leadership of Likud in Mr Sharon's place.

While the former Prime Minister and recent finance minister Benjamin Netanyahu is favourite to replace Mr Sharon at the head of a shrunken Likud, both Mr Mofaz and the foreign minister, Sylvan Shalom, could be alternatives.

The decision to form a party was a logical step which took account of Israeli public opinion, which unlike Ariel Sharon's right-wing tormentors, supports the withdrawal of settlers and troops from Gaza, writes DONALD MACINTYRE



Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon: No risk, no gain.

Both are Sephardic Jews, who may appeal to the working immigrant Jews from Muslim countries to which the new Morocco-born Labour leader Mr Peretz is appealing.

They are also less likely to be associated with the benefit-cutting policies of Mr Netanyahu which are likely to form a key part of the Labour leader's campaign. Tzipi Livni, the upwardly mobile woman minister who heads the justice department, Avraham Hirschon and Gideon Ezra were the other ministers to join Mr Sharon.

While new breakaway parties have a poor record of success in Israeli politics —

such as the flopping of David Ben-Gurion's Rafi party in 1965 — strategists pointed out that Mr Sharon was the first in Israel — and indeed pretty well anywhere else — to have led one as an incumbent Prime Minister, in control of the government agenda until the election, and with high personal approval ratings of between 60 and 65 per cent.

One strategist said the formation of the party was a logical step which took account of Israeli public opinion, which unlike Mr Sharon's Right-wing tormentors, mainly supported the withdrawal of settlers and troops from Gaza in August.

"Israeli opinion has changed just as

Ariel Sharon's has and this party will be in tune with that opinion."

Among figures outside mainstream party politics that have been canvassed to join the new party are Avi Dichter, the past head of Shin Bet, Israel's domestic Intelligence agency and Professor Avi Braverman, president of the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. Despite earlier speculation Shimon Peres, the veteran Labour leader ousted by Mr Peretz, will not join Mr Sharon's new party and Mr Sharon indicated at his Press conference on Sunday night that his former coalition deputy would be leaving mainstream politics.

The decision, like the success of Mr Peretz in winning the Labour leadership little more than a week earlier, has shifted the tectonic plates of Israeli politics and left the question of who will emerge as the leader of the biggest single party after the election almost impossible to predict.

Mr Sharon insisted that he was not planning further unilateral disengagements from the West Bank and was sticking by the internationally agreed "Road Map" which he has always insisted can only be activated if the Palestinian leadership disables militant factions.

But political analyst Yaron Ezrahi said he believed that Mr Sharon would do well in the election and that his success might well presage a return to the peace process.

Saying that Mr Sharon had recently ("and only recently") shown himself to be a statesman in the mould of Ben Gurion and the late Yitshak Rabin, Prof Ezrahi added: "Israelis have not often seen political leaders who are able and willing to take very big political risks to pursue policies which they regard as being in the vital interests of Israel.

"The era of unilateralism is over because [Mr Sharon] will no longer be leading a party of 40 Knesset members," he said. Current polls show Mr Sharon and Mr Peretz both gaining about 28 seats.

But Ahmed Khalid, a Palestinian analyst and former negotiator who is close to Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian President, said: "The better Mr Sharon does in the election, the more we are likely to see unilateral moves, and the more Mr Peretz does we may see some form of negotiations." But he warned that these might still lead to an "interim solution with provisional borders" which would fall short of Palestinian aspirations.

— *The Independent*

Sharon may change the course of Israeli politics

By Jal Taraporevala/TNN

The decision of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel to leave the Likud Bloc and form his own party, National Responsibility, in the run-up to elections in March 2006 has transformed the mould of the country's politics. Sharon's move has essentially been prompted by his inability to stamp his authority on Likud following the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in August and the renewed challenge for the leadership of the party by former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

This being so, Sharon has calculated that, rather than lead a badly divided party into the elections, his interests would better be served by forming a separate group. He will now project a centrist image in an attempt to undermine the electoral base of the right wing Likud Bloc and the left-of-centre Labour Party which has recently been galvanised by the election of Amir Peretz as its new leader.

However, whether Sharon's political gamble pays off is debatable. National Responsibility, which will be based on Sharon's personality and policies, will not find it easy to rapidly build up a strong organisational base and portray itself in broader terms that go beyond the

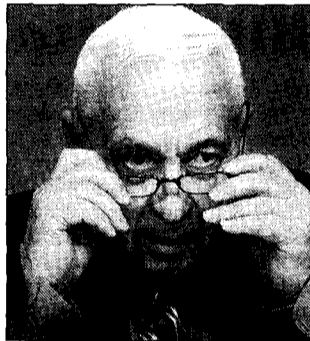
politics of its leader.

Besides, any split in the traditional Likud vote will work in favour of the Labour Party.

For his part, Peretz will argue that Sharon's bid to occupy the centre ground should not hide his staunchly right-wing past and current hardline stand on the core issues involved in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. How effectively Peretz manages to get this message across will hinge on the evolving security scenario in Israel in the pre-elections period and the outcome of the parliamentary polls in the Palestinian territories in January 2006.

Sharon's efforts to enlist the support of Sephardi voters (the oriental Jews who have historically backed Likud) could be undermined since Peretz hails from this community. Sharon will also have to counter the corruption scandal surrounding his son, Omri, and the point that break away parties have not traditionally done well in Israel.

Of the three main groups, Likud will be the biggest loser as a result of the shake up in Israeli politics. After all, Likud will have to fight the polls without Sharon, who was its principal electoral asset, and its efforts to appeal to uncommitted centrist voters will be substantially weakened by the formation of National Responsibility.



Sharon will now project a centrist image in an attempt to undermine the electoral base of the right wing Likud Bloc and the left-of-centre Labour Party which has recently been galvanised by the election of Amir Peretz as its new leader

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sharon gives up on his own party

Ariel Sharon has been battling opposition within the Likud party to his plans for a settlement with the Palestinians.

Steven Erlanger

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon and a key ally, Tzippi Livni, the Justice Minister, have begun to contact political allies to join the new party he would lead. A Likud official said: "There are matters that he wants to accomplish that many in the [Likud] party would not accept."

Mr. Sharon, 77, has been battling self-styled "rebels" within Likud who opposed the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza and four small settlements in the West Bank last summer as a violation of the party's principles and history. The rebels have been led by the former Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who quit the Cabinet just before a final vote approving the Gaza withdrawal.

While he has kept his intentions to himself, Mr. Sharon has told intimates that he would like to be the leader who defines, at last, the borders of Israel. He has said that he does not want to be a Prime Minister whose hands are bound by a party that opposes territorial compromise with the Palestinians and would object to any significant Israeli pullback in the occupied West Bank.

Mr. Sharon's apparent decision to roll the dice was accelerated by the recent defeat as Labour Party leader of ally Shimon Peres, 82, who chose to throw support to Mr. Sharon and join his ailing coalition to ensure that the Gaza withdrawal was implemented.

But Mr. Peres's successor, Amir Peretz, 53, won over Labour by insisting on breaking



Ariel Sharon ... setting off tremors. - PHOTO: AFP

the coalition and forcing new elections. Earlier on Sunday, the Labour Party voted to pull its eight Ministers out of the Sharon Cabinet.

Israel's President, Moshe Katsav, could refuse Mr. Sharon's request for early elections, but is more likely to accept. By law, in such a circumstance, elections must take place within 90 days, which would likely mean a vote in early March, preventing Mr. Sharon's enemies in Likud from delaying elections.

Mr. Sharon, a tough former army commander, is nicknamed "the bulldozer" for his tendency to force through obstacles to get what he wants. He has been criticised for arrogance, impetuosity and investigated for illegal fundraising — his son, Omri, has just done a plea bargain on such charges. Mr. Sharon was investigated by an Israeli commission after the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon's Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by Israel's Christian allies in Lebanon. He was found to have indirect responsibility for failing to foresee and prevent the massacre and was banned from serving again as Defence Minister.

Early polls show that a new party led by Mr. Sharon would be the largest in Parliament, with some 28 seats out of 120, but he would require other parties to form a coalition. Likud currently has 40 seats, but Mr. Sharon faces severe dissent within the party and its central committee, which regards him as having betrayed the principles of Likud by his willingness to hand occupied territory considered part of the biblical land of Israel over to the Palestinians without negotiations.

Mr. Sharon has received significant support from President George W. Bush. But new elections will put any new moves toward peace on hold, even as the Palestinians are planning their own crucial elections for a new legislature on January 25.

On Sunday, after leading what is likely to be the last meeting of the current cabinet,

Mr. Sharon praised Mr. Peres and said, "This is the beginning of the joint work between us." Mr. Sharon told his old rival and ally: "I won't let you turn away from completing the missions you are destined for. I'll call on your assistance in the future."

Israeli political commentators immediately saw the statement as a sign that Mr. Sharon would break away from Likud.

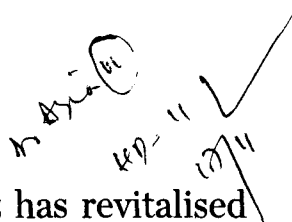
Historically, "instant" parties have not done well at the polls in Israel; even founding leader David Ben Gurion only got 10 seats when he broke with Mapai and formed his own party, Rafi, in 1965. Ironically, perhaps, Rafi also included Mr. Peres.

But Mr. Sharon is popular, and the prospect of his leaving Likud has already produced numerous rivals to Mr. Netanyahu — including Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom and Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz.

A Sharon exit from Likud would create "a political earthquake of unprecedented magnitude," according to the most popular Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*. "Senior Likud officials believe that Sharon is about to smash the existing political establishment in Israel to pieces and build on its ruins a system that will crystallise and remain stable for years to come." Well, maybe. Political analysts have speculated for some time on the formation of a centrist party that can pull together a generalised mood for negotiated progress with the Palestinians without sacrificing Israel's security. — **New York Times News Service**

2/11
11
Ariel Sharon

Revolutionary in Israeli politics



In less than a week Amir Peretz has revitalised the Israeli peace camp and brought a rare optimism to the Middle East.

Jonathan Freedland

THE LAST few days have brought an optimism to the Middle East that is hard to resist. The chief cause of the current, unfamiliar burst of optimism is a man who, in less than a week, has revitalised the Israeli peace camp. His name is Amir Peretz, a Moroccan-born trade-union leader who has dedicated his life to fighting poverty – and last week he defied every poll and pundit in the land to become the new leader of Israel's Labour party.

Already people are speaking of a revolution in the country's politics, a new "Peretzstroika" according to the veteran peace activist Uri Avnery (who also noted that the Hebrew word *peretz* could be read as "breakthrough." The beleaguered Israeli Left is hailing the new leader's arrival as the best news since the collapse of the Camp David peace process five years ago.

Why the excitement? Start with Mr. Peretz's position on the central question, the conflict with the Palestinians. For two decades – long before it was fashionable – he has advocated a Palestinian state. He calls now for an end to Ariel Sharon's unilateralism and a renewed pursuit of a negotiated peace, engaging with the Palestinians directly. He dares to speak of a return to the "path of Oslo," brave in a country where the architects of the 1993 accords are routinely referred to as the "Oslo criminals."

There is immediate politics in this, marking a clean break with the outgoing Labour leader, Shimon Peres – the grand old man who has moved in Israel's ruling circles since before Mr. Peretz was born in 1952. While Mr. Peres was prepared to let Labour serve as Likud's hind legs in a national coalition, barely questioning Mr. Sharon's unilateralist approach, Mr. Peretz wants out. He is pushing for Labour to bolt now, triggering early elections by next spring.

But there is more to Mr. Peretz's stance than electoral calculus. In his speech to the rally that gathered on Saturday to mark the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, Mr. Peretz called for a "moral road map, whose guiding star is respect for human dignity," arguing that Israel's continued rule over the Palestinians was exacting a moral cost on Israelis themselves. "A moral road map is ending the occupation and signing a permanent agreement," he said, before invoking Martin Luther King to declare that he too had a dream – that Palestinian and Israeli children

would one day "play together and build a common future."

Mr. Peretz is from what used to be known as "the Second Israel," Jews with roots in the Muslim or Arab world: in today's argot, Mizrachim. Fifty years after their arrival in the country, they are disproportionately poor, often living in so-called development towns – and many harbour great resentment at the condescension and discrimination meted out to them by the then rulers of the state, the mainly European Jews, or Ashkenazim, of the Labour party.

Likud tapped into that anger in 1977, when it finally wrested power from Labour, and has relied on it ever since. The result has been a strange paradox. In Israel, the Left party, Labour, has won the votes of the well-to-do, educated elites – while the poor and disadvantaged have rallied to the party of the Right, Likud. In the process, "peace" has come to seem the preserve of latte-sipping, Ashkenazi Tel Aviv – not of hard-working, Mizrahi Sderot.

Mr. Peretz upends that logic. He is himself a working-class man from Sderot, one who can speak to the millions lost to Labour for so long. He is no token, but an authentic grassroots leader, one who has fought hard for workers' rights and equality, eventually running the Histadut, Israel's TUC. All this cracks open Israeli politics, reopening a Left-Right divide that had closed in the post-Camp David period of glum consensus. Suddenly Mr. Peretz presents a clear alternative to the Thatcherite, neoliberal economics pursued under Mr. Sharon – which have exacted a desperate social cost, casting huge numbers of Israelis into poverty. At the same time, he sets out a stark choice between himself and Mr. Sharon on the conflict with the Palestinians: a negotiated deal or more of the same.

And Mr. Peretz links the two. He argues that defence spending and the occupation have drained too much money for too long. He wants the cash currently spent on settlements to go towards Israel's poor instead: for him economic security is part of national security. Will he succeed?

He faces, in Mr. Sharon, a master strategist who has colonised the centre ground and held on to it. The odds are against him. But Mr. Peretz has defied the odds before – and all those who yearn for peace in the Middle East should pray he defies them again. –

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Israel, Palestine seal Gaza deal

HF-13 16/11 W.A.M. (W) ✓

ASSOCIATED Press
Jerusalem, November 15

ISRAEL AND the Palestinians have reached a deal on Gaza border crossings, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced on Tuesday. Rice oversaw a deal that gives Palestinians control over a border for the first time and strengthens Abbas ahead of elections.

The agreement was reached in marathon negotiations overseen personally by Rice who stayed a day longer than planned in Jerusalem to shepherd the deal to a conclusion. Rice praised the deal at a news conference as a "big step forward" in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Under the deal, the Gaza-Egypt border would tentatively open on November 25, and construction of a Gaza seaport would begin, she said. Palestinians

would be able to travel between the West Bank and Gaza in bus convoys through Israel.

An agreement gives the Palestinians control over a border for the first time and provides a much-needed boost to the shattered Gaza economy. It also marks an important breakthrough for the sides, who had failed to capitalise on the momentum created by the withdrawal.

It also strengthens Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas ahead of the January 25 parliament elections and help him fend off a strong challenge by the Islamic militant group Hamas.

Negotiators met throughout the night at the Jerusalem hotel where Rice was staying, with Rice shuttling between the sides.

On Tuesday morning, she met with Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz to finalise the details.

Tehran defiant over Israel slur

Tehran, October 28

THE IRANIAN president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, refused on Friday to retract his call for Israel to be wiped off the map, while the Iranian embassy in Moscow attempted to calm the growing diplomatic crisis.

Mr Ahmadinejad appeared at an anti-Israeli rally attended by thousands of Iranians in Tehran and rejected the international condemnation of his comments as "invalid".

"My words were the Iranian nation's words. Westerners are free to comment, but their reactions are invalid," he said.

The Iranian embassy in Moscow earlier attempted to pull back from his declaration after the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, became the latest world leader to rebuke him.

A statement released by the embassy said Mr Ahmadinejad "did not have any intention to speak up in such sharp terms and enter into a conflict".

But the remarks were unlikely to satisfy Israel, which called today for an emergency session of the UN security council.

"We have decided to open a broad diplomatic offensive," the Israeli foreign minister, Silvan Shalom, said.

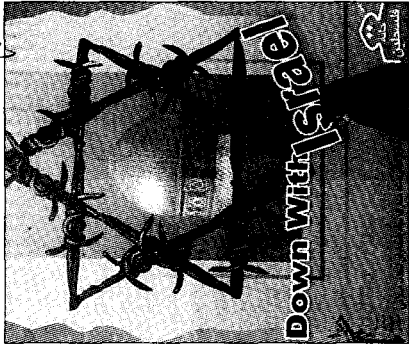
The country's prime minister, Ariel Sharon, called yesterday for Iran to be expelled from the UN.

"A country that calls for the destruction of another people cannot be a member of the UN," he said.

Protestors in Tehran and other Iranian cities burned Israeli flags today and held banners displaying anti-Israeli slogans including "Death to Israel, Death to America".

Demonstrations were held across the country to mark the last Friday of the month of Ramadan.

Mr Ahmadinejad's comments, made on Wednesday, have been widely condemned by world leaders including Tony Blair,



AFP
An Iranian woman passes by an anti-Israeli slogan under a star of David in Tehran on Friday.

who called them "completely and totally unacceptable".

Speaking after the one-day EU summit at Hampton Court, in Surrey, Mr Blair warned that the world would demand direct action against Tehran if the threats were repeated.

Missile attack

Israeli aircraft fired two missiles into northern Gaza Strip on Friday but caused no damage or casualties. The air strike in an open area followed Palestinian militants' firing of a makeshift rocket into southern Israel, which also caused no damage or casualties. Israel has stepped up pressure on militants after a suicide bombing that killed five Israelis on Wednesday.

Reuters, Gaza

"When we hear such statements made about Israel, it makes us feel very angry. It's just completely wrong," Mr Blair said.

Mr Annan is due to visit Iran over the next few weeks to discuss other issues, including

Tehran's nuclear programme.

However, the secretary general now says he will place the Middle East peace process and the "right of all states in that area to live in peace, within secure and recognised boundaries, free from threats or acts of force" at the top of his agenda.

In an unusual display of public condemnation, Mr Annan expressed his "dismay" yesterday at Mr Ahmadinejad's remarks and warned Tehran that all UN members had agreed to "refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity ... of any state".

The US, Canadian, Russian and European leaders have all criticised Mr Ahmadinejad's remarks, though none backed Mr Sharon's demand that Iran should be thrown out of the UN.

Several countries, including Britain, France, Russia, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands have also rebuked Iranian diplomats.

The Guardian

Israel sends tanks, troops into Gaza

ASSOCIATED Press
Jerusalem, October 27

ISRAEL ON Thursday rolled tanks into the West Bank city of Jenin and launched air raids over the Gaza Strip as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon threatened a widespread response to a suicide bombing. He ruled out any peace effort till Palestine reined in its militants.

One of Islamic Jihad's top commanders in the West Bank, Abed al-Khaleem Ezzedine, was arrested during a brief army incursion which was punctuated by gun battles at the western entrance to the city. Palestinian security sources said around 40 jeeps and tanks had moved into Jenin and surrounded houses as shooting rang out. Two Apache helicopters could be seen circling overhead.

After arresting six suspected militants, the troops left the city. There were no reports of casualties.

Sharon said the airstrikes and artillery attacks would continue and there would be more arrests in northern West Bank, where Wednesday's bomber came from. As a last resort, tanks or infantry could re-enter Gaza, which Israel evacuated last month.

Sharon said Palestine's refusal to take action had made military operation necessary. "Unfortunately they have not taken any serious action to battle terrorism," he said. "We will not accept under any circumstances a continuation of terrorism. Therefore our activities will be broad and nonstop."

Palestinian Prime Minister Ahmed Qureia said Israel's response to the suicide bombing had only enflamed the tense situation. "We have condemned the Hadera attack. It doesn't serve our people's interests, but at the same time we condemn the Israeli aggression. This aggression doesn't ensure calm," he said.



Sharon wants Iran out of UN

ISRAELI PRIME Minister Ariel Sharon said on Thursday that Iran should be expelled from the United Nations amid global outcry over a call by Iran's President for the Jewish state to be wiped off the map.

The international community expressed outrage at Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's inflammatory speech which Israel now hopes will galvanise efforts to penalise its public enemy number one for its nuclear activities.

"A country which called for the destruction of another cannot be a member of the UN," Sharon said, echoing earlier calls from Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres. "Such a country, in possession of nuclear weapons, is a danger not only to Israel and the Middle East but to Europe as well," the Israeli Prime Minister added. The time, Sharon said, had come to move the Iranian file to the Security Council.

The White House also echoed Israel's concerns over Iran, while the EU condemned the call as "despicable and unacceptable". Russia too has condemned the Iranian President's remarks.

AFP

Syria battles to stave off U.N. sanctions

President pledges to bring to justice any Syrian linked to Hariri murder

DAMASCUS: With the threat of United Nations sanctions looming large, Syria is scrambling to assure the international community it is cooperating with the U.N. probe into the murder of former Lebanese Premier Rafiq Hariri.

At the U.N., the United States, France and Britain challenged the rest of the Security Council to adopt a very tough resolution against Syria, which would threaten sanctions if Damascus fails to cooperate fully with a U.N. investigation into the assassination of Hariri.

The pressure on Syria is likely to intensify when a report by the U.N. special envoy on Syria-Lebanon, Terje Roed-Larsen, on disarming Lebanese militias is released.

There are allegations that Syria is continuing to smuggle arms to Palestinian militia groups in Lebanese refugee camps, in violation of a Council resolution adopted in September 2004 demanding that all militias be disarmed.

Warning against pressure

Embattled Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has pledged to bring to justice any Syrian linked to the February murder, following a damning U.N. report which directly implicated Damascus in the attack.

"I have declared that Syria is innocent of this crime, and I am ready to follow up action to bring to trial any Syrian who could be proved by concrete evidence to have had connection with this crime," Mr. Assad said in a letter sent to Washington, London and Paris, the *Washington Post* reported.

Mr. Assad also warned that any international pressure brought to bear on Syria would have "serious repercussions" in the region.

The Security Council, which heard from the U.N. chief investigator Detlev Mehlis on Tuesday, is currently split on whether to impose sanctions to force Syrian cooperation or wait for the U.N. report to be completed on December 15.

The draft resolution calls on Syria to detain "Syrian officials or individuals" whom the U.N. probe considered suspects in the car bombing.

Mr. Mehlis's report, delivered to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan

Syria under pressure following Hariri murder report

Rafiq Hariri Self-made millionaire - sought to diminish Syrian involvement in Lebanese politics and opposed pro-Syrian presidency of **Emile Lahoud**

A UN Security Council draft resolution will demand Syria arrest any of its nationals - including high-ranked officials - identified as suspects by the investigation into the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, or face punitive sanctions

President Emile Lahoud Nearing end of 6-year term

2004

Aug: Hariri summoned to Damascus to meet Syrian President **Bashar al-Assad** (left), who wants to extend Lahoud's term in office. Hariri later claims Assad threatened to "break Lebanon over (his) head" if he did not approve

Sep 2: UN Security Council **Resolution 1559** calls for withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon

Sep 3: Hariri bloc approves extension law

Sep 4: Economy Minister **Marwan Hamadeh** and three others resign from Cabinet in protest

Oct 1: Assassination attempt on Hamadeh in Beirut

Oct 4: Hariri resigns - Lahoud names **Omar Karama** head of new government

Oct 12: Mitsubishi Canter van stolen in Sagamihara City, Japan

2005

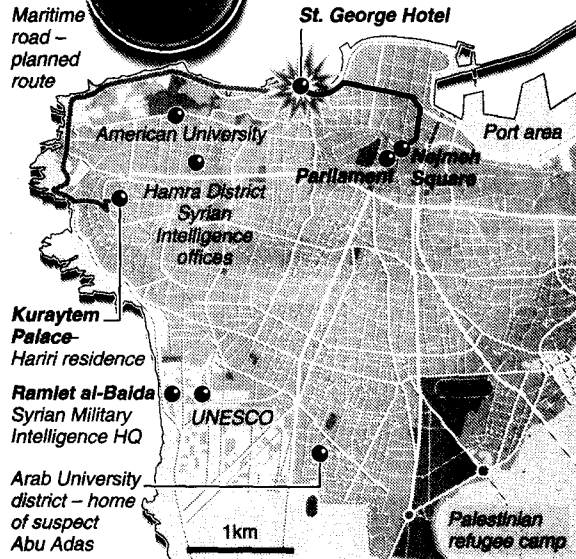
Jan: Ten prepaid phone cards bought by **Raed Fakhreddin** nephew of consultant to Karama - in Tripoli. Six phones using these cards communicate only with each other in weeks before explosion

Jan 12: **Abdullah Abu Adas** religious, introverted student, disappears from home in south Beirut - call from a "friend" says he is going to Iraq

Feb 11-13: Stolen Mitsubishi van allegedly seen at Syrian military base in Hammana, 25km from Beirut

Feb 14: 12:30pm Hariri walks from Parliament to cafe in **Nejmeh Square**
12:40pm 1st explosion in six-vehicle security convoy headed along pre-planned route
12:50pm Second blast kills Hariri and 22 others outside St. George Hotel. Abu Adas claims responsibility in video delivered to al-Jazeera TV - but parents claim he was forcibly abducted

BEIRUT Feb 14, 2005



Mobile phone records multiple calls using same six prepaid cards made from 11:00-12:53 on all routes between Nejmeh Square and Kuraytem Palace

Mitsubishi Canter van:

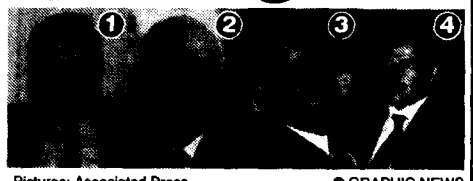
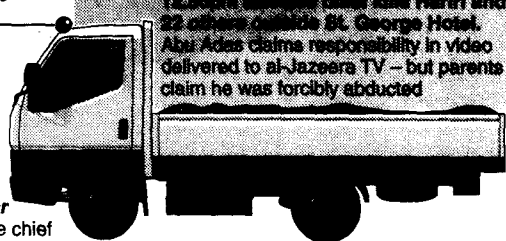
Travelling at just 8km/h in front of Hariri motorcade carrying 1,000kg of TNT

SUSPECTS - DETAINED

1. **Major General Jamil al-Sayyad** former head of Lebanese General Security
2. **Brig. Gen. Raymond Azar** Lebanese military intelligence chief

IMPLICATED

3. **Brig. Gen. Ghazi Kanaan** Syrian Interior Minister - appears to commit suicide Oct 12, 2005
4. **Brig. Gen. Assef Shawkat** Assad's brother-in-law and head of Syrian intelligence - faces lawsuit over alleged framing of Abu Adas



Pictures: Associated Press

© GRAPHIC NEWS

after a four-month investigation, cited "converging evidence" of Syrian and Lebanese involvement and accused Damascus of blocking and misleading the investigation.

A confidential version of the re-

port named Mr. Assad's youngest brother Maher and his brother-in-law Assef Shawkat, also military intelligence chief, as part of a group of senior Lebanese and Syrian officials who in September last year "decid-

ed to assassinate" the former Premier. Mr. Assad made contact on Tuesday night with Russian President Vladimir Putin to underline Syria's willingness to cooperate with the inquiry. - AP, AFP

Syrians denounce Hariri report

Demonstrations were organised by state-run labour unions

DAMASCUS: Hundreds of thousands of Syrians demonstrated in their two biggest cities on Monday against a U.N. report implicating Syria in the killing of a Lebanese leader, as the Government pulled out all the stops to show it enjoys support at home, if not abroad.

"Mr. Mehlis: we are not murderers," read one banner, referring to Detlev Mehlis, German prosecutor who wrote the report that implicated top Syrian security officials in the February killing of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The United States and Britain are pushing for the U.N. Security Council to adopt a tough stand on Syria when it debates the Mehlis report on Tuesday. But France indicated on Monday it would not support sanctions against Syria before the Mehlis commission had finished its work.

"There is no divergence" from the United States, French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy told reporters in Paris. He said France saw the commission, whose mandate runs to December 15, as a chance to get to the bottom of the matter.

"Let us allow that commission to run its full course," Mr. Douste-Blazy said.

The mass demonstrations in Damascus and Aleppo, northern



Thousands of Syrians rally in central Damascus in support of the regime on Monday. - PHOTO: AFP

Syria, were a concerted attempt by all branches of the Government to drum up support for President Bashar Assad ahead of expected international pressure.

"Syria will never be another Iraq," read one banner, while the crowd chanted: "With our soul and our blood, we redeem you, Bashar!"

The Government gave students a one-day holiday and encouraged civil servants to take part in the demonstrations, which were organised by state-run labour unions. Police diverted traffic to make way for the protesters. - AP

Handwritten notes: "N. Hariri" with a circled 'H', "15", and "25/10".

Lebanon arrests man named in Hariri killing

Syria Demands Fresh Int'l Probe

Beirut: Lebanese authorities arrested a man who a UN probe said had called President Emile Lahoud shortly before the murder of the country's former prime minister, a security source said on Saturday.

Security forces detained Mahmoud Abdel-Al early on Saturday based on a warrant issued by Lebanon's Prosecutor General Saeed Meerza, the source said, speaking on

argued on Saturday that it cooperated fully with a UN probe into the assassination of a former Lebanese leader and accused anti-Syrian witnesses of lying to tie the Damascus regime to the murder. But Saad Hariri, son and political heir of slain billionaire Rafik Hariri, praised the UN investigation and called for an international tribunal to try the alleged plotters.



The hour of truth has come. The blood of the martyr Rafik Hariri and his colleagues will not have been shed in vain

—Saad Hariri

condition of anonymity. The UN report into the February 14 killing of former Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, presented to the Security Council on Thursday, said Abdel-Al "made a call minutes before the blast" to Lahoud's mobile phone. Lahoud's spokesman has strongly denied that the president had been in contact with Abdel-Al. The UN report also cited Abdel-Al's brother, Ahmad Abdel-Al, a member of the pro-Syrian Islamic militant Ahabash group, as a key figure in the killing plot.

Meanwhile, facing intense US-led pressure and possible economic sanctions, Syria

"The hour of truth has come," Hariri said in televised speech from the Saudi Arabian city of Jiddah. "The blood of the martyr Rafik Hariri and his colleagues in the march toward freedom, dignity, sovereignty will not have been shed in vain."

Damascus sought for a second straight day to dispute a UN report that implicated Syrian and Lebanese officials in the bombing that killed Hariri

"All that was contained in the report is based on presumptions and allegations," Syrian Foreign Ministry advisor Riyadh Dawoodi said at a news conference. Agencies

Hariri killing: Syria, Lebanon in the dock

Calls for Lebanese President's resignation; Syria alleges political frame-up behind U.N. report

UNITED NATIONS: Senior officials in the Syrian security services most likely approved the murder of former Lebanese Premier Rafiq Hariri, a U.N. commission probing the assassination has concluded.

The commission's report released on Thursday cited "converging evidence" of Syrian and Lebanese involvement and accused Damascus of blocking and misleading the investigation.

"There is probable cause to believe that the decision to assassinate ... could not have been taken without the approval of top-ranked Syrian security officials and could not have been further organised without the collusion of their counterparts in the Lebanese security services," the report said.

Quarrel with Syria

Hariri had quarrelled with the country's Syrian overlords and eventually resigned in October 2004, a month after Syria imposed a change in Lebanon's laws to extend the term of the pro-Damascus President Emile Lahoud.

The document was delivered to U.N. chief Kofi Annan by German magistrate Detlev Mehlis, who led the commission's four-month investigation into the massive bomb blast that killed Hariri and 20 others in Beirut last February.

It was also sent to the 15 members of the U.N. Security Council as well as to the Lebanese Government before being made public late on Thursday.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton called the commission's conclusions "clearly trou-



CONVERGING EVIDENCE?: Lebanese President Emile Lahoud (right) with the former Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, in Beirut in this file picture. - PHOTO: AFP

bling." In Lebanon, news of the report drew renewed calls for the resignation of Mr. Lahoud, who denied claims by the commission that he received a phone call from a key suspect minutes

before the bomb blast that killed Hariri.

Damascus has strenuously denied any involvement in or prior knowledge of the murder, but the U.N. report said Syria's per-

vasive military intelligence presence in Lebanon made such denials ring hollow. "It would be difficult to envisage a scenario whereby such a complex assassination plot could have been car-

ried out without their knowledge," the report said.

"Many leads point directly towards Syrian security officials as being involved with the assassination," it said, calling on Syria

to clarify "a considerable part" of the unresolved questions.

Describing Syrian cooperation with the probe as a matter of form rather than substance, the commission said a number of interviewees had even tried to deliberately mislead the investigation.

In particular, it noted that a letter addressed to the Mehlis panel by Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara proved to contain "false information."

The 54-page report noted that a number of witnesses had voiced fears that they would be harmed for cooperating with the probe.

The assassination, it said, was carried out by a group "with an extensive organisation and considerable resources" and had clearly been prepared over the course of several months.

The commission recommended that the investigation now be taken forward by the appropriate Lebanese judicial and security authorities.

Damascus rejects charge

An increasingly isolated Syria on Friday angrily rejected as false, unprofessional and politicised the U.N. report that accused Damascus of approving the assassination of Hariri.

Syrian Information Minister Mahdi Dakhllallah said the report was "a political statement directed against Syria."

The report was based on witnesses "who are well known for their anti-Syria stands," Mr. Dakhllallah's office said, charging that the U.N. assessment lacked hard evidence and was based mainly on "gossip." - AFP, AP

Deadlock broken in E.U.-Turkey talks

Austria backs down over three key demands; Erdogan studies draft text amid anger at setbacks

Nicholas Watt and
Helena Smith

LUXEMBOURG/ISTANBUL: Turkey's allies on Monday night hailed Austria's climbdown on E.U. membership talks, but warned that Vienna had created a sour atmosphere which would guarantee a decade of gruelling negotiations.

With Turkey smarting at Europe's behaviour, one supporter said Austria had to abide by its commitments when it assumes the E.U. presidency in January.

Richard Howitt, U.K. foreign affairs spokesman in the European Parliament, who sits on a joint committee with the Turkish Parliament, said: "I am delighted that after 24 hours of marathon negotiations Austria has been beaten into submission. Beyond the wrangling and horse trading of an E.U. summit the question is whether Europe is outward looking and multiethnic. That has been achieved. But I greatly sympathise with Turkish friends who, having met the conditions set last December, watch as Austria re-

neged and convened 11th-hour negotiations that were never justified. The Austrians must not be allowed to renegotiate when they assume the presidency."

Turkey's ruling AK party was studying the draft text of a proposal outlining conditions for starting membership talks after a late intervention from the U.S. to stop the deal from falling through, according to Turkish officials.

Focus on semantics

With the meeting behind closed doors, political commentators said it was difficult to gauge the mood of Turkey's negotiating team or how long they would need to debate the document. "They're concentrating on the semantics and how to present it to the press," said Ahmet Evin, a leading political analyst. "My understanding is that the issue of major obstruction has ended. It's now about maximising Turkey's interests."

At least 30 senior cadres from the neo-Islamist Justice and Development party were said to be attending the meeting convened



ACKNOWLEDGING CHEERS: Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Parliament in Ankara on Tuesday. — PHOTO: AP

by Prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan who wants as much domestic consensus as possible over the document. Mr. Erdogan has staked his political career on Turkey realising its 40-year dream of joining the E.U. and is determined to ensure that his country is not seen as selling out. British officials, who are Turkey's greatest champions in the E.U., had long faces as they arrived early on Monday for the second day of talks. Ursula Plassnik, Austria's Foreign Minister, was digging in her heels and demanding changes

to the ground rules for the talks. She wanted the E.U. to drop its commitment to a "shared objective" that the talks with Turkey would lead to full membership and make an explicit reference from the outset — to an "alternative" to full E.U. membership.

This would have turned the talks on their head because E.U. leaders agreed last year that this would be offered at the end if the talks failed.

Cyprus issue

The main bone of contention lay in article five of the draft text which required Turkey to lift its veto against divided Cyprus joining international institutions such as NATO. Turkey legally has a say in what entities Cyprus can join. Allowing it to sign up to international bodies would be tantamount to Ankara recognising the Greek-run administration in the south.

Turkey will face 10 to 15 years of grinding negotiations which may well end in failure. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

European Union will "watch" the trial of Turkish writer

Pamuk facing charges for writing about the deaths of Kurds and Armenians

ISTANBUL: The European Union enlargement chief met on Saturday Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk at his home in Istanbul, where the two discussed freedom of expression ahead of Mr. Pamuk's December trial for allegedly insulting the Turkish identity.

A Turkish prosecutor used a clause in the penal code to open a case against Mr. Pamuk, one of Turkey's most successful writers, for remarks he made about the deaths of Kurds and Armenians in Turkey.

The clause has also been used in recent days to convict an Armenian-Turkish journalist, raising concerns about Turkey's tolerance of free expression.

The E.U. has said it will be watching closely when Mr. Pamuk goes before a judge on December 16.

Controversial code

European Union Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, on the third day of a visit to Turkey following the opening of the country's E.U. membership talks on Tuesday, met Mr. Pamuk for around an hour and a half, NTV television reported.

Mr. Pamuk said he and Mr. Rehn did not discuss the case directly, but talked about "human rights in Turkey in general," the Anatolia news agency reported.

The 301st paragraph of the new penal code says "a person who insults Turkishness, the Republic or the Turkish Parliament will be punished with



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk (left) and E.U. Commissioner for the Enlargement Olli Rehn answer journalists' questions in Istanbul on Saturday. — PHOTO: AFP

imprisonment ranging from six months to three years."

Some prosecutors have liberally interpreted the code and used it to try those who question Turkey's treatment of minorities, particularly Armenians and Kurds.

On Friday, Turkey convicted Armenian-Turkish journalist Hrant Dink under the same clause for an article he wrote earlier this year in which he mentioned poison and Turkish blood in the same sentence.

The court said the article was "intended to be insulting and offensive," while Mr. Dink said

his words were taken out of context.

Mr. Dink, who has lived in Turkey all his life, received a six-month suspended sentence.

He said the conviction was an attempt to silence him and held back tears as he said on Turkish television that he would leave Turkey if he could not get his conviction overturned.

Genocide charge

A case was opened against Mr. Pamuk after he told a Swiss newspaper in February, "30,000 Kurds and 1 million Armenians were killed in these lands and

nobody but me dares to talk about it." He was referring to those killed during Turkey's two-decade conflict with Kurdish rebels and to Armenians killed by Ottoman Turks around the time of World War I.

Armenians and several countries recognise those killings as the first genocide of the 20th century, which Turkey denies.

"My trial isn't something that worries me, but Turkey's democracy, human rights and freedom of expression are important details for all of us," Anatolia quoted Mr. Pamuk as saying. — AP

The pain is still raw

One of the most troubling questions hanging over Algeria concerns the truth about the thousands who went missing in the civil war of the 1990s.

Michael Slackman

WHO WILL be the author of Algeria's history? Will it be a former member of the Islamic Salvation Front, Nassiridin Turkman, who says that Islamic militants played no role in the massacres that left more than 100,000 innocent civilians dead in the 1990s?

Will it be President Abdelaziz Bouteflika who maintains that the state's security institutions played no role in the disappearance of more than 6,000 people? Or will it be the member of Parliament who says that people are not really missing at all, but rather are hiding in Europe?

It is, of course, impossible to say who will write the final chapter concerning a civil war that paralysed this country for more than a decade. But what is certain, right now, is that President Bouteflika has decided he is not interested in an accurate accounting of the past. The President has just pushed through a charter for Peace and National Reconciliation, approved recently by voters, that offers amnesty to militants for all but the worst crimes and exonerates state security agencies from wrongdoing. He has decided that the best antidote to the violence that divided his country is to declare that everyone is a victim, and to try to move forward.

But the years of killing have left many people angry, alienated from one another, distrustful of their government and locked in their own accounting of the past. Without any formal process of truth and reconciliation, the details of Algeria's history depend on who is talking, and that has some people concerned about the future.

"If we do not have reconciliation, we will not be able to heal the wounds, they will remain open," said Daho Djerbal, editor of a journal of social criticism in Algeria called *Naqd*. "We live in a society where individuals are part of a group, and we fear that there will be actions of revenge and vendetta."

Algeria is not the first country to try to sweep its past sins away. Argentina and Chile, for example, each tried to bury a violent past only to find that the years did little to ease society's collective conscience. Today each has moved toward accountability and repentance. Chile forced its military to apologise to torture victims. Argentina has declared its amnesty laws unconstitutional.

In Algeria, the outlines of what sickened the country are well known: In 1991, the government agreed to allow its first multiparty elections for parliament. A militant group, the Islamic Salvation

Front, which already controlled local councils all over the country and had issued communiqués saying it was opposed to democracy, seemed to be winning control. At that point the military stepped in, nullifying the elections and declaring martial law. Members of the front, known as FIS, were arrested and sent off to camps in the desert. The Islamist militants took up arms, ran into the mountains and began the civil war.

But the broad outlines of this conflict do little to ameliorate the pain of children whose parents were killed for no reason; or of parents whose children were dragged away never to be seen again. Both sides want answers and accountability, and yet none are forthcoming. Instead, Algeria seems to be moving further away from confronting the truth.

One of the most troubling questions hanging over Algeria concerns the missing. During the war, thousands of people were taken away by state security agents and government-armed militias, never to be seen again. A presidential commission studied the issue and said 6,146 individuals were taken by security agents, a figure that human rights groups say is low. The report tried to absolve the state of responsibility by saying the disappearances were the actions of rogue agents. But now the Government, in its recently adopted charter for peace, and its supporters are insisting that the state agents did nothing wrong and that the issue of the missing is resolved — even while it is not.

"We cannot make any concessions on knowing the truth," said Lila Ighil, whose brother Mohammed has been missing since 1997. "What they are saying now, this is not true."

But in support of the President, a member of parliament, Ayachi Daadoua, said in an interview that the government had recently come across new information that proved that many of the missing were actually alive and well. "We have found out in this campaign for the charter that a lot of people considered missing are living under different names and are parts of organisations based in Great Britain and Germany," he said.

Critics of the government say the problem with the sweep-it-under-the-rug approach is that it speaks to a fundamental flaw in a society that is trying to present itself as fit to rejoin the international community. The problem, they say, is it shows that Algeria remains a country ruled by power, not by laws. And that is a problem that, as in Chile and Argentina, will ultimately need to be addressed, no matter how much time passes. —New York Times News Service

THE HINDU

Torture: threat to Turkey's E.U. bid

Ian Traynor and
Ewen MacAskill

LONDON: Opponents of Turkish accession to the E.U. were given fresh ammunition on Tuesday with revelations of human rights abuses, torture and starvation in the country's psychiatric institutions, and a move to ban a gay rights organisation.

The blow to Turkey's attempts to present itself as a modern, reforming state came in advance of a ceremony in Brussels on Monday to begin the formal accession process to the E.U. Austria, as well as France and Cyprus, have expressed reservations about Turkish entry.

British support

The British Government, which is Turkey's main champion within the E.U., is hopeful that the accession ceremony will go ahead without any country lodging an objection.

But a Washington-based lobby group, Mental Disability Rights International, carried out a two-year investigation and says it found that practices in the state's mental health institutions, including routine abuse of electro-convulsive therapy, breached all the European regulations. "Inhuman and degrading conditions of confinement are widespread throughout the Turkish mental health system," the report says. "People with psychiatric disorders and people with intellectual disabilities are subject to

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Inhuman and degrading conditions widespread in Turkey's mental health system, says rights group

treatment practices that are tantamount to torture."

Thousands of people are detained arbitrarily and illegally, often for life, with no possibility of legal redress, the report says. Ivan Fiser, the organisation's Europe director, said: "What's unique about Turkey is the abusive use of shock therapy and the conditions for children which result in high mortality rates."

Although the Turkish Government refused to provide mortality statistics for the researchers, the report estimates that half the children at the country's biggest child psychiatric hospital, near Ankara, die every year. "Staff reported children dying from starvation and dehydration," the report says. "Staff came quickly into the room, dropped off bottles, then picked up the bottles as they left. If a child could not pick up the bottle to eat or drink, she starved." Infants were locked alone in small rooms. Others were tied by their hands and legs to their cots, the report says. The authors are to present their findings in Istanbul. —

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Excitement and fear stalk the land in Syria

U.N. success in Lebanon could shatter the political dominance of the military in the Arab world.

David Hirst

WHEN LEBANESE police in August arrested four former army and intelligence chiefs, once pillars of President Lahoud's pro-Syrian regime, as suspects in the murder of the former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Arab commentators quickly understood that something profoundly significant was happening — not just for Lebanon, but the whole Arab world. The arrests were made at the request of Deter Mehlis, head of the U.N. team investigating the case. Although, technically, the Lebanese state was exercising its sovereign authority, it could not have done so without the international support that Mr. Mehlis embodies.

For Ghazi Dergam, of the pan-Arab newspaper *al-Hayat*, the inquiry "will cause an earthquake in the whole Arab region... the era of political assassinations is over." For Rami Khouri, of Beirut's *Daily Star*, the arrests marked "a truly historic turning point that could shatter the dominance of political power by Arab security and military establishments" ... with "the same impact in this region as the birth of the Solidarity trade union movement had in eastern Europe 25 years ago... ultimately resulting in the collapse of the communist police state system."

Perhaps. But the resistance to such a process will be fierce, and nowhere more so than in the first place to which it must spread if it is to take hold even in Lebanon, let alone the rest of the Arab world. That place, Damascus, is where Mr. Mehlis last week embarked on the crucial widening of his mission.

The region-wide implications of the Hariri affair stem from the abiding fact that what happens in one part of the Arab "nation" is inherently liable to have an exemplary effect on others, especially if it is something con-

structive. It also stems from the contemporary fact that this nation has become a primary target of external interventions — by the U.S., Europe, and the U.N., whose proclaimed purpose is to treat the maladies, tyranny, terrorism and abuse of human rights, deemed to contribute to this now world-endangering condition. So there is clear linkage, in Arab minds, between the currently two most important such interventions, the small-scale one in Lebanon and the radical one in Iraq.

Different in particulars, they have in common the basic aim of repairing or reconstructing governing systems ravaged by conflict or misuse. But whereas, for American, Iraqi and regional reasons, the radical one sinks ever deeper into the mire of potential calamity, the smaller one — largely welcomed by the society to which it is applied — is working.

Of all Arab countries, Lebanon was best favoured for such an experiment. Thanks to the pluralism of its explicitly sectarian politics, it had a resilient, if flawed, democratic tradition that never succumbed to the authoritarian norms of its Arab environment, though thanks largely to years of Syrian domination it had been going down that road. Yet in the end it was Syria's very excesses that generated its "democratic uprising" and the consequent American- and French-led international will to back it in the shape of Mr. Mehlis's investigation.

His pursuit of the "truth" about Hariri is seen as central to the whole reconstruction enterprise. And so far so good. But in his upcoming interim report to the U.N., leaked to the Beirut press, he openly doubts whether Lebanese institutions are yet capable of trying and convicting culprits he unmasks on their behalf, so fearful do witnesses remain of possible reprisals by remnants of the

old, Syrian-dominated order which — with Lahoud at its head — are still fighting a rearguard against the rise of the new, headed essentially by Hariri's close friend and current Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora. He suggests the UN-Lebanese partnership should evolve into an international tribunal. Yet the challenges Mr. Mehlis still faces in Lebanon pale before his Syrian ones. There, the potential impact of the "truth" lies not just in its exemplary effect, but in the fact that Damascus was bound, in the end, to become the core of the inquiry — with all its possible consequences. If the U.N.-enforced withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon dealt the Ba'athist regime a mighty blow, Mr. Mehlis could deal it a mortal one. That is what many Syrians think, and why a mixture of excitement and fear now stalk the land.

Unenviable choice

President Bashar Assad faces an unenviable choice — between cooperating with Mr. Mehlis or defying him — and he seems to be veering bemusedly between the two. By suddenly welcoming him to Syria, he was ceding what, on grounds of national sovereignty, he had hitherto effectively opposed. But if Mr. Mehlis goes on to demand the arraignment of suspects as high-ranking as their Lebanese counterparts — and, if Syria is indeed guilty, the trail will indubitably lead to the innermost circles of power — will he cede that too? For the weak head of a regime built around clan solidarity and the consensus of rival power fiefdoms, an attempt to save himself and a chosen part of it through the sacrifice of another part is, Syrians say, a red line he simply dare not cross. It is a recipe for the internal explosion, which, in the absence of an effective opposition, has long been seen as the likeliest manner of the Ba'ath-

ists' eventual undoing.

But to defy Mr. Mehlis, as he hints at eventually doing, and portraying him and all his works as an American-led conspiracy against Syria itself, would seem almost as suicidal in the end. It would turn Syria into an international outcast, align Europe behind economic sanctions and, far from fousing an already disaffected and restive people in patriotic defence, further persuade most of them that their government is the prime source of their deepening woes, with the Hariri murder as a crowning blunder for which they pay the price.

The people's, especially the opposition's, excitement stems from the prospect of seeing at least some of their rulers get their come-uppance before an international tribunal. Their fear, even amongst this self-same opposition, stems from the belief that, thanks to the legacy of Ba'athist rule, a regime crisis would automatically degenerate into a national one, even civil war.

So serious is this fear that "*apres moi le deluge*" is seen as Mr. Bashar's last great card, his only chance of clinching a grand bargain — yielding up all the strategic assets, in Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, that always furnished the means to impede or assist American purposes in return for survival — and continued mastery — in his own house. If the Syrians themselves are so worried, shouldn't the world be too? Would it really like its "good" intervention, undeservingly, to go the grim way of its "bad" one — and risk a second Iraq? If, in the era of George W. Bush's "freedom and democracy," it was cynical enough to strike such a bargain with a minor player such as Colonel Gaddafi, mightn't it do the same with an embattled Mr. Bashar, for much greater reward, at the strategic and emotional heart of the Arab world? — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

Israel launches missile attack on Fatah office in Gaza City

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Arab nations plan resolution against Tel Aviv's nuclear programme at IAEA meet

GAZA CITY: An Israeli aircraft fired a missile at an office building early on Wednesday, damaging the structure and knocking out power in part of Gaza City. No injuries were reported.

The air strike hit a two-storey building used by the ruling Fatah movement. The offices provide tutoring lessons to school children, and cash and food assistance to families in the impoverished Tufah neighbourhood.

The attack left a big hole in a wall of the building, smashed windows and destroyed an electrical transformer. Windows on several nearby houses were broken, and a car was damaged by flying debris.

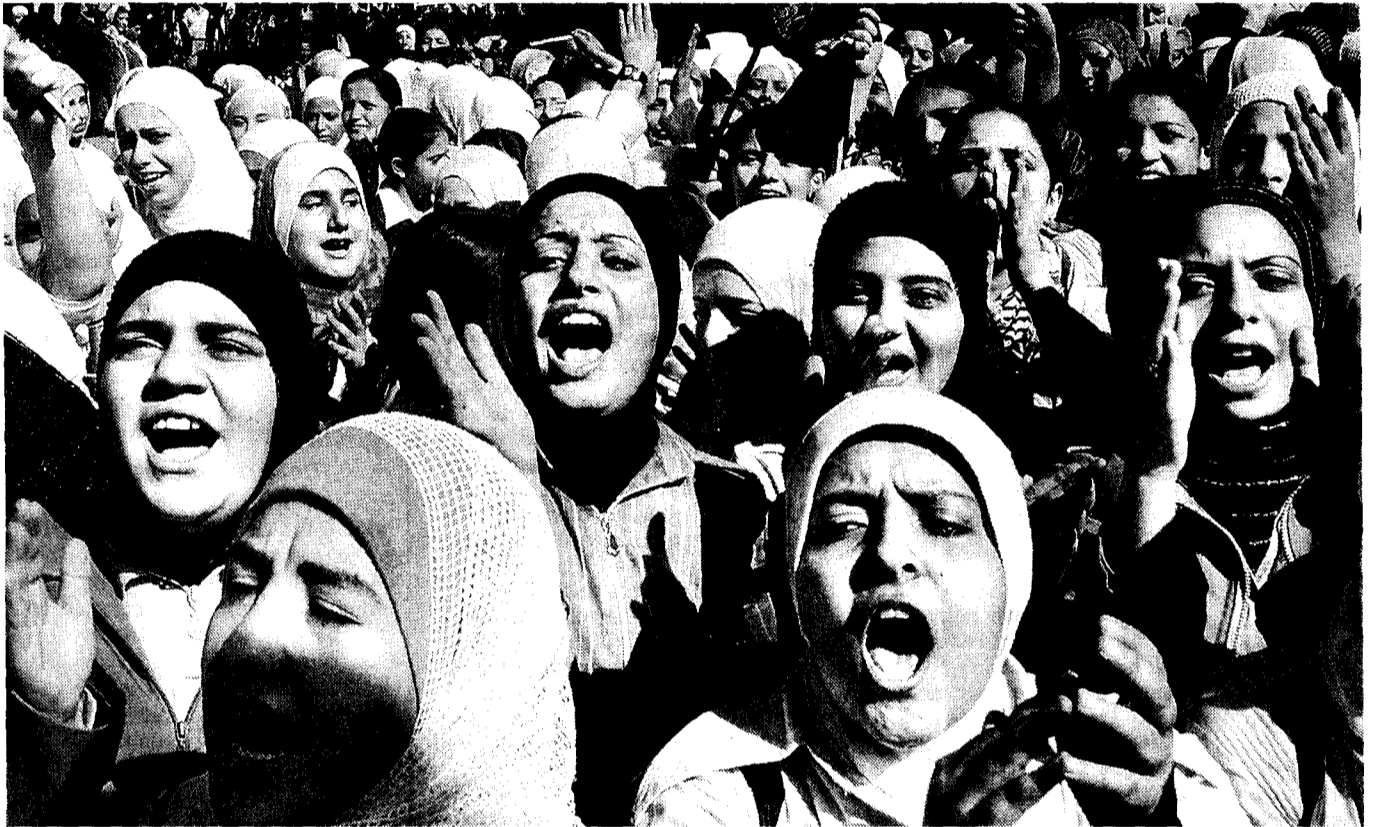
The army confirmed it had targeted a Fatah building. It gave no further details.

Threat to peace

Israel has carried out a series of air strikes in recent days aimed at Islamist militant targets.

Meanwhile, in Vienna, Israel on Wednesday urged Arab nations to abandon a push to have it declared a menace to peace at a 139-nation meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency, suggesting Iran's suspect nuclear programmes posed the real threat to West Asia.

Gideon Frank, the head of Israel's Atomic Energy Commis-



DENOUNCING ATTACKS: Some of more than 5,000 Palestinians march on the streets of al-Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus to mark the fifth anniversary of the latest Palestinian uprising on Wednesday. - PHOTO: AP

sion and Israel's chief delegate to the IAEA's general conference, was responding to preparations by Arab countries to present a resolution stating that Israel's secretive atomic pro-

gramme threatened West Asia peace. Israel "will not be in a position to support" a separate resolution urging all West Asian nations to throw open their nuclear programmes to IAEA con-

trols unless the plan to table a text on an Israeli threat is dropped, he said.

Israel neither confirms nor denies its nuclear status but is considered the only nation in

the region with nuclear weapons. Experts say Israel continues to produce atomic weapons and already has more than 200 warheads, as well as the capability to quickly build more. - AP

THE FINCU

Israeli offensive despite Hamas pledge to halt fire

Several buildings damaged in the offensive; Jihad vows attacks

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REDUCED TO RUBBLE: Palestinian schoolgirls walk past the collapsed roof of the Akram School which was hit in an Israeli missile strike in Gaza City, on Sunday. - PHOTO: AP

GAZA CITY (GAZA STRIP): Israeli aircraft attacked suspected weapons factories throughout the Gaza Strip on Monday, pushing forward with an offensive against Palestinian militants despite a pledge by a top Hamas leader to halt rocket fire against Israel.

The violence came as top officials from the ruling Likud Party voted in a crucial poll that could determine whether Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon remains in the party or dissolves the Government and creates a new centrist party.

The vote was ostensibly about whether to move up the party primary from April to November, but Mr. Sharon and his main party challenger, Benjamin Netanyahu, have turned the poll into a vote of confidence in Mr. Sharon's leadership. Many party hard-liners said they would use

their votes to punish Mr. Sharon for his pullout from the Gaza Strip. "I hope that members of the party will come to vote against this proposal, which will badly harm the Likud," a smiling Mr. Sharon said as he cast his ballot on Monday afternoon.

Sound system sabotaged

Mr. Sharon was thwarted from addressing a party convention on Sunday night when his microphone cut out twice. Likud officials said the sound system had been sabotaged. After waiting for nearly half an hour, he left the hall without speaking.

The air strikes early on Monday hit targets around Gaza City as well as the southern towns of Rafah and Khan Younis. They knocked out power to the eastern part of Gaza City and caused damage to several buildings, but

no injuries were reported.

The army said its targets included an access road leading to a rocket-launching site in northern Gaza, and weapons-manufacturing factories and storage facilities belonging to various militant groups.

Later in the day, aircraft fired missiles at an empty field that militants used to launch rockets at Israel, in a strike meant to deter further attacks, the military said.

Israel pressed ahead with its air campaign despite a call by Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar to end the group's rocket attacks. Mr. Zahar said Hamas remained committed to a seven-month-old cease-fire and he wanted to prevent further Israeli attacks.

"We call on our military groups to stop their operations against the enemy from the Ga-

za Strip," he said.

Even if Hamas stops its rocket attacks, it remains unclear whether smaller militant groups would follow suit. Islamic Jihad's top leader in Gaza Mohammed al-Hindi said the group would no longer observe the cease-fire following a deadly air strike on Sunday that killed Islamic Jihad's top commander in southern Gaza, Mohammed Khalil, and his bodyguard.

"There is no talk of a truce, there is only room for talk of war," Mr. Al-Hindi said.

Israeli security officials said they would wait to see whether the Palestinian attacks would in fact halt before calling off the military offensive. On Monday afternoon, militants launched a mortar shell at an Israeli community north of Gaza, the army said. There were no injuries or damage, they said. - AP

A timetable now for withdrawal of U.S. troops is not in our interests: Talabani

Iraqi President **Jalal Talabani** says "within the next two years Iraqi forces will be able to take responsibility for internal security." In an interview with Global Viewpoint contributing editor **Raghida Dergham** in New York, he also spoke about the Iran-U.S. relationship.

The battle for the Constitution is still ongoing despite the amendments that have been introduced to it. We know that Amr Moussa, the secretary-general of the Arab League, welcomed parts of it. But is it ready enough right now to get the endorsement of the Sunni Iraqis?

The Constitution has been completed in a fundamental way, and the National Assembly has endorsed it and has submitted it to the United Nations. But some of our Sunni Arab brothers still oppose the Constitution in its current form. Some oppose some of its articles and accept the majority, but others accept it.

What is the timetable right now? You will put the Constitution to a referendum and then when will there be general elections? What will happen if there is a "no" vote to the Constitution?

If the Constitution is ratified by the 15th of next month, then there would be elections by the end of the year. But if it is rejected next month, then we will still have to do another election on the eighth of January to elect another National Assembly to draft again another Constitution.

There is the perception that there is an undermining of the Sunnis by the rise of the Shiite power and the Kurdish power. Doesn't this endanger the cohesiveness of the Iraqi state?

This is not true. It is true that the parliamentary majority is Kurdish and Shiite, but we have included many Sunni elements in the process of drafting the Constitution. It became apparent that we have big differences with some but not all of them. For example, some wanted an Islamic republic in Iraq; others totally reject federalism for the south. Some also refuse to acknowledge Kurdish as an official language along with Arabic and so on.

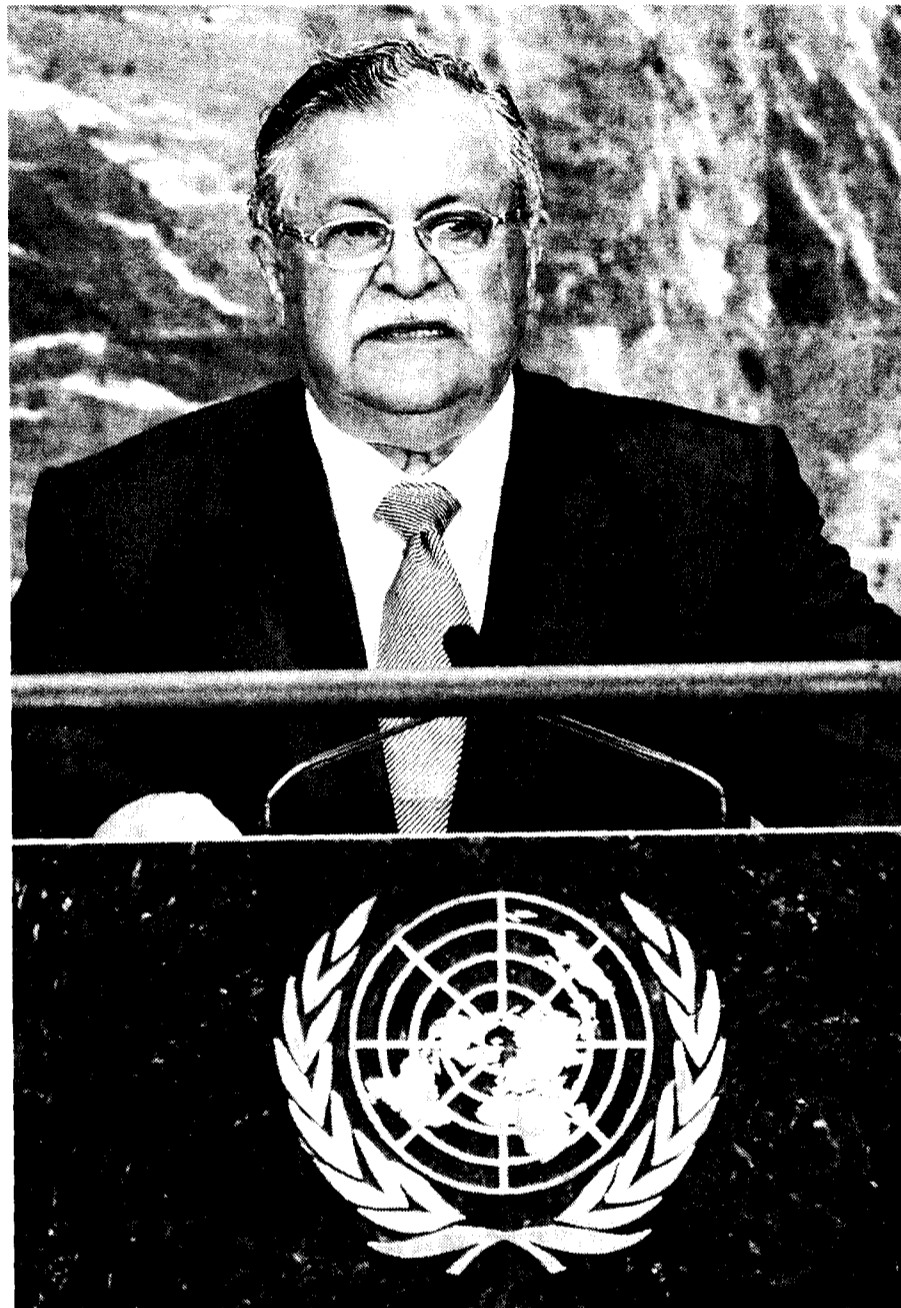
Iran is rather influential in Iraq. You yourself have said that the liberation of Iraq also could be seen as in the interests of Iran. What is behind the rise of the Shiite power in Iraq, and is there an alliance with Iran? Is there something to what King Abdullah of Jordan once described as the "Shiite Crescent"?

First of all, in a way, the wars in liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan were in the interests of Iran. The rise of the Shiites as a notable force is due to their number and to their struggle in the opposition. And I have met with King Abdullah and I found him not to be insistent on this description he gave expressing his concerns about the "Shiite Crescent."

If indeed the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were beneficial to Iran, should Iranians be grateful to the United States? Have they been?

In my opinion, the U.S. deserves gratitude for getting rid of Saddam [Hussein] and the Taliban. This act has saved Iran from danger coming from the east and west. However, if they express their gratitude or not is not my responsibility.

Yet the Iranian-American relationship is



Iraqi President Jalal Talabani: "We have managed to maintain good ties with Iran and America." - PHOTO: REUTERS

rather tense most of the time. We even hear that the question for the U.S. is to bomb or not to bomb Iran because of the nuclear issue. Do you feel the U.S. and Iran are headed toward escalation, or do you feel there can be an accommodation between the two countries?

I do not think that the Iranian-American relation is moving toward escalation. The Americans have opened a wide door for the Iranians to back down from the so-called pursuit of the nuclear bomb, and so I do not expect an Iranian-American military confrontation.

How do you expect the two countries to solve the problem between them?

It is very difficult to project. I am asking you because Iraq is in the middle of the Iranian-American relationship.

We have managed to maintain our good ties with Iran and America at the same time. **With the blessing of the United States?**

I do not know whose blessing it is, but this is our policy.

What about the rise of the Kurdish power? Some are being very critical; some are saying that you want too much and that you are acting as the victorious people in Iraq. What do you say to them?

There are 190 states in the United Nations; some have populations of only 15,000

people. Is it too much for the Kurds to attain their right of federalism within an independent unified Iraq? The Kurdish people in Iraq are no more than 6 million people. After a long struggle for democracy in Iraq and for attaining their rights, they have achieved victory.

However, compared to other states in the world, compared to other peoples, the Kurdish people remain the only ones deprived of their independence.

Were you independent before the U.S. invasion?

Before the invasion ... [stutters] liberation. You say invasion, I say liberation. From 1992 to 2003 the Iraqi Kurdistan was out of the control of the Iraqi regime. We had our parliament, our government, our army, our police forces, our economy and our ties with the outside. After the liberation of Iraq, we came back to Baghdad. We gave it the right to set up a government, the right to have foreign affairs and have a national army, merging the Peshmerga (Kurdish militia) into the police forces and security forces and the army.

But you are happy to have the Kurdish state only within Iraq?

We are Iraqi Kurds, and we are not interfering in the other parts of Kurdistan.

When you met with President Bush, did he discuss with you what is repeatedly said in American circles that what the administration wants for both your neighbours in Syria and Iran is regime change? Is this what you heard from the President?

I did not hear about a change of regime but a change of behaviour.

For both?

About Iran I did not hear but about Syria, yes. We are striking good relations with Syria. My personal relations are very good. I am most grateful to what it did for us when we were in the opposition. It offered us valuable assistance and enabled us to continue the struggle against Saddam. That is why I feel morally indebted to Syria. Any problem can be solved in dialogue as brothers.

You were quoted as saying you might want some American forces to stay on in Iraq.

That is not what I said. I will repeat what I said: Perhaps it would be in the interest of Iraq that American forces would stay in limited numbers at certain bases in Iraq after they complete their current mission.

When do you think there will be a withdrawal of American forces on the current mission?

My estimate is that within the next two years Iraqi forces will be able to take responsibility for internal security. But the phasing of withdrawal is an issue directly related to American-Iraqi relations and to certain conditions for both countries. Declaring a timetable now is not in the interest of Iraq because the terrorists would consider that their victory, and it would boost their morale.

(By arrangement with TMS, Inc/Asia Features.)

Iran promises proposals to end stalemate

STEVEN R. WEISMAN &
WARREN HOGUE

NEW YORK, SEPTEMBER 16

PRESIDENT Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran said on Thursday that his country would present new proposals on Saturday to try to break the impasse over Iran's nuclear programmes, but he provided no details.

At the UN on Thursday, Ahmadinejad also met with Secretary General Kofi Annan and the foreign ministers of Britain, France, Germany and the European Union. Speaking to reporters, Ah-

madinejad said Iran did not have nuclear weapons and "there is absolutely no proof of a violation on the part of Iran" of its pledge to keep its nuclear programme peaceful. He displayed impatience over what he said was the difficulty in disproving an unfounded allegation, saying, "Usually, you cannot prove that sort of thing. How can you prove that you are not a bad person?"

European diplomats indicated that they might defer their effort to bring Iran to the United Nations Security Council for possible punitive action if sufficient progress was made in talking with Iran's leaders.



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad at the UN

Emerging from the evening meeting, Jack Straw, Britain's foreign secretary, said, "What we are going to

'Bush gave new life to talks'

TEHRAN: Comments by US President George W. Bush underlining Iran's right to a nuclear energy programme have given fresh impetus to Tehran's talks with the European Union, a senior Iranian official said on Friday. "Bush's speech has provided the Europeans with the space they needed to continue talks with Iran," he said. "Bush's speech was an obvious retreat from his past stances, thus paving the way for further negotiations." **REUTERS**

do is to listen carefully to what the president says on Saturday afternoon and take it from there."

The speech is expected to outline a proposal aimed at resuscitating the stalled negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme.

In the past the US and the EU have said they may turn to the Security Council for possible sanctions, although Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has indicated that such action might not be imminent.

Secretary Straw said the session yesterday was "useful" because it gave the Europeans the first opportunity to meet Ahmadinejad. Earlier in the day, the four Europeans met with Ali Larijani, Iran's new chief nuclear negotiator, for the first time. **NYT**

Turkey not yet fit to enter EU

589
1679
A "no" to Turkey starting negotiations to enter the European Union on 3 October "will have centuries of implications", as one influential academic, Husseyin Bagci,

put it to me last week. It would push a wounded Turkey back into the arms of the nationalists, even perhaps hardline fundamentalists, and be grist to the mill of those who argue that the Christian Western world will always consider itself superior and apart from the Muslim one.

It would, as the provost of Istanbul's Bahcesehir university, Eser Karakas, told me, make clear that Europe has no interest in becoming the great power that Turkey could help make it with its large population and army, able to play an influential role in West Asia, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and not being subordinated always to US policies.

Yet if there are no good reasons for a "no", there are reasons for caution. Moreover, now that Angela Merkel looks poised to become the next German chancellor, with her view that Turkey should only be granted "a privileged partnership", not full membership, Europe will be compelled to slow down and think hard about Turkey.

Turkey is still too much muddling through to modernity. For two centuries it has been creating a middle class that belatedly has been trying to absorb the wisdom and philosophy of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment.

But still, for a majority Turkey's inheritance remains the Ottoman Empire, which, unlike the Arab caliphates of the 8th to 11th centuries, did not push forward the frontiers of knowledge, despite its military prowess.

world view JONATHAN POWER

The tensions between these two worlds are what still make it difficult for Turkey to be as European as its present-day rulers want. Turkey is still catching up and on important issues this shows.

When I was negotiating last week to interview Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, I was repeatedly told by his closest staff, "This interview will be on condition you promise not to ask about the Kurdish situation." But since it is Turkey's long-standing brutal, civil war with its 20 million Kurds that has done

more than anything to keep Turkey waiting at Europe's gate for so long, this is an old-fashioned, authoritarian reflex.

The fact is that the reason that the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and its 7,000 fighters up in the mountains of the southeast began fighting again this year, breaking a five year truce, is that Ankara has not delivered on its promises to the Kurds.

It promised free broadcasting in Kurdish and education in Kurdish. Yes, there are, now Kurdish newspapers for sale on the streets,

there is some Kurdish music on the radio, there has been an attempt to open private academies to teach Kurdish, but the sum of it doesn't begin to compare with the freedoms the Welsh have in the UK or the Basques in Spain.

There is no free broadcasting in Kurdish nor Kurdish in the primary schools.

The promised reforms have not been pushed through an unwilling bureaucracy and this is why when the prime minister made his conciliatory, landmark speech in Diyarbakir, the Kurdish "capital", a month ago, the crowd was a desultory 600.

To refuse to discuss this subject out loud and to pretend all is well suggests that

Mr Erdogan believes that sweeping unresolved problems under the carpet for the next three weeks will somehow make this serious failing just disappear off the European agenda.

Turkey is still not capable of generating for itself all the essential ingredients of a modern, democratic state. It has only made the rapid strides of the last five years to reform its human rights practices, its judiciary and police, and the ubiquitous and powerful role of the army in political affairs, because the EU dangled the carrot of entry before it.

Turkey, eighty years after Ataturk pointed its nose in the direction of Europe, is still lacking in original thinking. All new ideas and high culture come from the West. The liberal, open, law-abiding, state is not yet a basic instinct.

Islam has a better historical record of religious tolerance than either Christianity or Judaism. But modern Turkey has been the exception. In 1945 Ataturk's successor, Inonu, dispossessed and encouraged Jews to leave. And 10 years later the large, Greek Christian community began to be driven out. Even today the Byzantine churches largely remain state-run museums.

There is precious little trace of the fact that for 1,100 years Constantinople was the centre of the Christian world. On 3 October, "yes" would be consistent with previous EU promises. It must, however, be a "yes, but". There cannot be promises about an entry date, it should be probably a generation away.



Members of the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party in the northern Iraqi village of Lijwa, close to the border with Iran. Ankara has not delivered on its promises to the Kurds, so fighting has resumed. — AFP

THE STATESMAN

'OUR PEOPLE ARE SMELLING FREEDOM'

Jubilant Palestinians enter Gaza

Washington, September 12

ECSTATIC CROWDS of Palestinians flooded into empty Jewish settlements on Monday, setting abandoned synagogues on fire and looting ruined buildings in a celebration of the end of 38 years of Israeli military rule over the Gaza Strip.

Plans by Palestinian police to bar crowds from the settlements quickly disintegrated, and militant groups hoisted flags and fired wildly into the air, illustrating the weakness of the security forces and concerns about their ability to control growing chaos in Gaza.

As soldiers poured out of Gaza, jubilant Palestinians turned Gaza's night sky orange as fires roared across the settlements. Women shrieked in joy, teenagers set off fireworks and crowds chanted "God is great."

Palestinians wish to build their state in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem — areas that Israel captured in the six-day war of 1967 — but fear Israel will not hand over the additional territory. They say Israel's occupation of Gaza has not ended, because it retains control over its borders and airspace.

Palestinian authorities had promised an orderly transition after the Israeli pullout, but the calls for calm were ignored. Police stood by helplessly as gunmen raised the flags of militant groups and crowds smashed what was left in the ruins or walked off with doors, window

frames, toilets and scrap metals. Empty synagogues were set alight in the Morag, Kfar Darom and Netzarim settlements, as well as a Jewish seminary in Neve Dekalim. In Netzarim, two young Palestinians waving flags stomped on the smoldering debris outside the synagogue, and others took turns hitting the building with a large hammer.

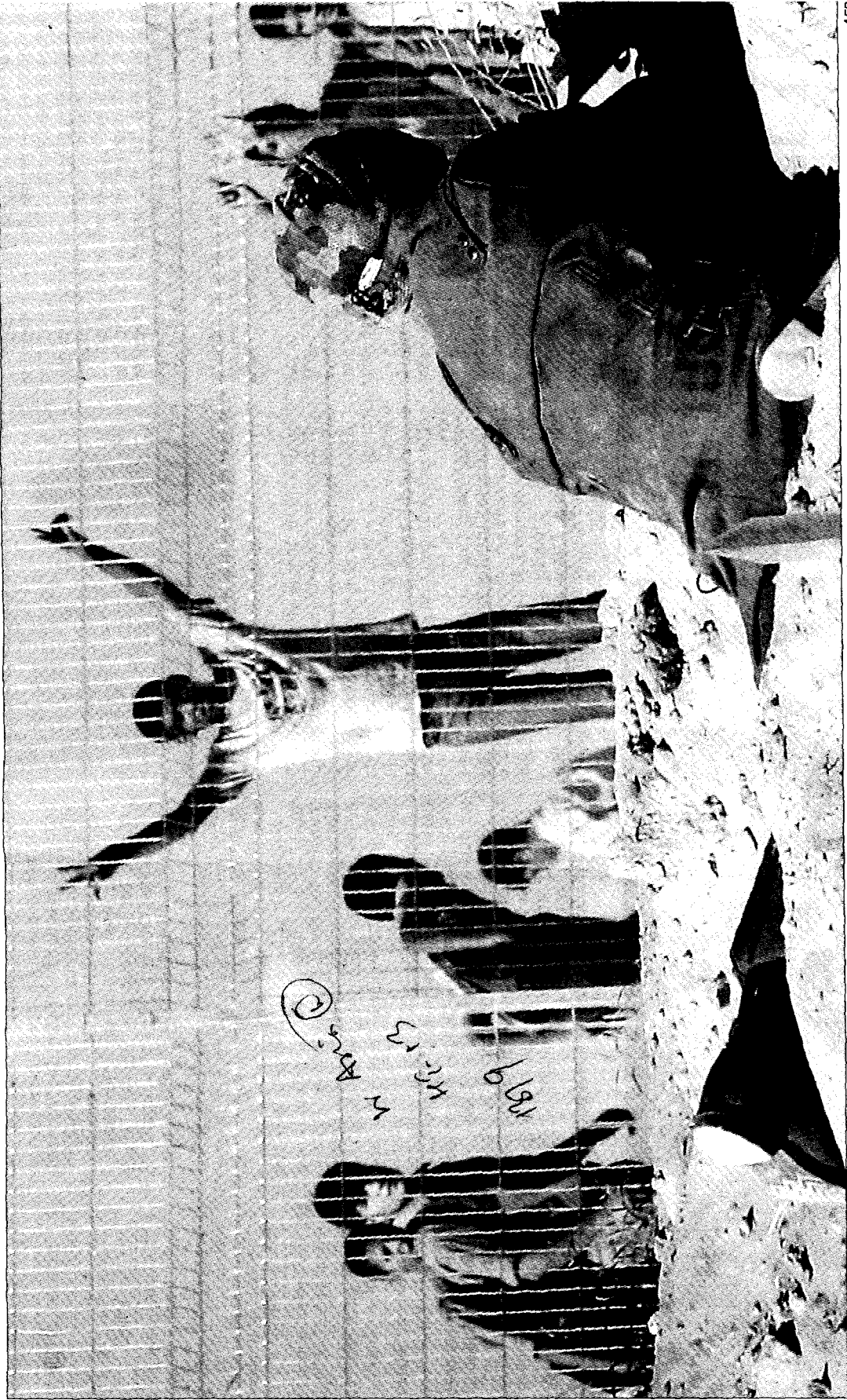
"They [Israelis] destroyed our homes and our mosques. Today it is our turn to destroy theirs," said a man in Neve Dekalim who gave his name only as Abu Ahmed.

Israel removed some 8,500 Gaza settlers from their homes in 21 months, but decided on Sunday to leave 19 synagogue buildings intact, drawing complaints from the Palestinians and criticism from the United States.

"Today is the beginning of a new era. The battle is still ahead of us. Gaza is only the first step," said Mohammed al-Hindi, the leader of the Islamic Jihad militant group, who was accompanied by dozens of followers. "The beginning will be when we liberate Jerusalem and the West Bank."

Abdullah Franji, a top official in Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah party, said: "Today our people are smelling freedom. We hope that our joy will be complete with free borders, with a connection to the West Bank and to have Gaza as the first step toward achieving the Palestinian state."

USA Today



A Palestinian youth flaunts the victory sign behind a fence as an Israeli soldier takes aim in the southern Israeli kibbutz of Netiv Haasara on the border with the Gaza Strip.

AFP

'Mission completed, an era has ended'

Gaza Strip, September 12

JUST after sunrise, the last column of Israeli tanks rumbled out of Gaza. Troops locked a smelted flag and hoisted their national flag, removed from the Gaza military headquarters, on the Israeli side of the border.

"The mission has been completed, and an era has ended," said Israel's Gaza commander, Brig. Gen. Kochavi, the last soldier to leave the strip.

As soldiers poured out of Gaza throughout the night, jubilant Palestinians rushed into the abandoned settlements, turning Gaza's night sky orange as fires roared across the settlements. Women shrieked in joy, teens set off fireworks and crowds chanted "God is great." "Today is a day of

joy and happiness that our people were deprived of in the past century," said Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, adding that the Palestinians still have a long path toward statehood. He denounced Israeli rule in Gaza as "aggression, injustice, humiliation, killing and settlement activity."

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has said he remains committed to the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan, which calls for an independent Palestinian state, but linked any further withdrawal to Abbas' ability to rein in militant groups.

"Israel has done its share and reiterates its call for the Palestinians to follow through, meaning their preventing terror against Israel and maintaining law and order in the territories under their

LAST WATCH



Ariel Sharon

control," said David Baker, an official in Sharon's office. Abbas refuses to confront militants, insisting he can persuade them to disarm peacefully. He has outlined

an ambitious plan to reconstruct Gaza's shattered economy, an effort he believes will bolster forces of moderation. But he faces a difficult task in Gaza, where militants and armed gangs operate freely and wield considerable power.

As Israel completed its pullout, Palestinian jeeps decorated with the flags of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad militant groups stopped just near the border and a group of masked gunmen waved their weapons before Palestinian police moved them away.

Pointing behind him at the border, Maj. Gen. Dan Harel, head of Israel's southern command, said the pullout presented an important opportunity for the Palestinians to take control of their future. "The responsibility belongs to the Palestinian Authority," he

AP

Jubilant Palestinians take over Gaza Strip settlements

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WASH
©

Israel hands over charge to Palestinian Authority after 38 years of occupation



JUMPING WITH JOY: Palestinian and Egyptian boys jump from the Egyptian side to the Palestinian side along the Gaza-Egypt border in Rafah, Philadelphi corridor, on Monday. — PHOTO: AP

Atul Aneja

MANAMA: Under cover of darkness, Israeli forces pulled out of Gaza, ending 38 years of military occupation of the coastal strip that will now be administered by the Palestinian Authority.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said that the withdrawal was an historic event and a joyful day for his people. "Today is a day of joy and happiness that our people were deprived of in the past century," Mr. Abbas said. He denounced Israeli rule

in Gaza as "aggression, injustice, humiliation, killing and settlement activity," and said the Palestinians have still a long way to go to achieve statehood. The Palestinians envision that their future state would incorporate the Gaza Strip, occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Abbas' concern

Mr. Abbas also expressed concern about Israel's insistence on monitor points of entry and exit into Gaza as well as control over the area's airspace and coastal

waters. The Israeli military occupation ended just after sunrise when the last column of tanks rumbled out of the Kissufim crossing into Israel. Israeli soldiers then raised the flag that had been removed from the Gaza military headquarters on the Israeli side of the border.

As the troops moved out, thousands of jubilant Palestinians rushed into many of the settlements that had been vacated. Ecstatic crowds entered the former Jewish enclaves, and there were reports that aban-

doned synagogues in the Morag, Kfar Darom and Netzarim settlements had been set ablaze.

Demolished homes

Israel removed around 8,500 Jewish settlers from their homes in 21 settlements in Gaza last month, and demolished homes and most buildings there. The Israeli Cabinet, however, decided on Sunday to leave 19 synagogues intact. Israeli troops handed over charge to the Palestinian Authority forces. Palestinian officers moved into Neve Dekalim

— the largest settlement, and hoisted the Palestinian flag at the former Israeli military headquarters. Palestinian police also headed to the vacant Netzarim settlement followed by cars that were packed with civilians who were honking horns and waving flags. Besides, they entered five other settlements, Palestinian Interior Ministry spokesman Tawfiq Abu Khousa said.

During the night, mosques reportedly blared chants in support of the withdrawal and fireworks lit up the sky.

One govt changes, another stays put

Ukrainian PM finds unexpected support

ASSOCIATED Press
Kiev, September 9

PRESIDENT VIKTOR Yushchenko's choice to replace the fiery Yulia Tymoshenko as Prime Minister won praise Friday from both the president's loyalists and opponents for having professional skills and few political ambitions.

Yuriy Yekhanurov, a 57-year-old former economics minister and governor of an eastern region, was appointed acting Prime Minister after Yushchenko abruptly fired Tymoshenko's Cabinet on Thursday. Yushchenko said the dismissals — along with the resignation of Petro Poroshenko, the powerful chief of the Security and Defense Council — were prompted by allegations of corruption and infighting between rival government clans.

The move left the president increasingly isolated, having lost two key allies of last year's Orange Revolution.

Yushchenko pledged in a meeting with regional leaders Friday that Yekhanurov would continue pursuing the goals of last year's Orange Revolution that propelled him to power. Lawmakers were expected to vote on his nomination in the next two weeks.

Yekhanurov pledged to con-

tinue the reforms begun by his predecessor, but said he would refrain from the heavy state intervention Tymoshenko was criticised for.

"We have used quite rough instruments before, now they will be more delicate," the Interfax news agency quoted Yekhanurov as saying. "There will be no hand-steering of the economy." Yekhanurov is seen as a more low-key figure than Tymoshenko, whose grand pronouncements, particularly about privatization, often sent shockwaves through the business community.

"He is a compromise figure," said Thomas Fiala, a senior analyst with Dragon Capital investment bank in Ukraine. "He is not connected with business interests or strong political lobbies ... and he is not overambitious." "He is not known as a conflict person, he has strong professional skills," said Yuri Kluchkovsky, from Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party.

Even some Yushchenko opponents backed Yekhanurov's candidacy. Yevgeny Kushnaryov, an Opposition leader who strongly backed Yushchenko's rival in last year's tumultuous elections, praised Yekhanurov as "a real professional, a decent and moral person." Yekhanurov, an ethnic Buryat, later moved to Ukraine.



SITTING PRETTY: Hosni Mubarak at Egypt's presidential palace.

Even an election can't displace Egypt Prez

ASSOCIATED Press
Cairo, September 9

PRESIDENT HOSNI Mubarak has won a fifth six-year term in Egypt's first contested presidential election, taking more than 80 per cent of the vote in a low turnout.

"Mubarak ... is the elected president," said *al-Gomhuria* in a headline. "Mubarak obtains the trust and support of the people," said another government newspaper, *al-Akhbar*.

The Presidential Election Commission, which ran the election on Wednesday and supervised the count, will announce the result at 5 pm GMT on Friday.

The monitors and the Opposition said the voting was marred by widespread abuses and irregularities, mainly by Mubarak's National Democratic Party (NDP) and by the organisers. But the abuses would not have affected the overall result, said several monitoring groups, including the independent Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights.

The Election Commission, whose decisions are final, on Thursday rejected a rerun request from Ayman Nour of the liberal Ghad (Tomorrow) Party, Mubarak's best-known rival.

Detailed voting figures from 15 of Egypt's 26 provinces, published in the state newspaper *al-Ahram*, showed that Mubarak won every-

where, with between 69 and 98 per cent of the vote.

The figures in *al-Ahram* gave an average of 83 per cent for Mubarak, but it did not include tallies for three big urban areas — Cairo, Giza and the Mediterranean city of Alexandria.

The turnout in big cities tends to be lower and the pattern of voting is more diverse than in rural areas.

A big surprise was the low turnout figures published in the newspapers, as low as 19 per cent in the southern province of Sohag. When Mubarak won his fourth six-year term by referendum in 1999, the government said 79 percent of people voted.

Observers have always said that the real turnout is very low, sometimes only a few percent in the presidential referendums, when people had no incentive to take part. Under the old system, Parliament chose Mubarak as the sole presidential candidate and people voted in a yes-no referendum. He decided to change the system after the United States and domestic groups pressed for political change.

The detailed figures in *al-Ahram* confirmed that Nour, the feisty young lawyer who ran the most vigorous campaign against Mubarak, was well ahead of Norman Gomaa of the liberal Wafd Party, which dominated Egyptian politics till 1952.

Polls point to Koizumi win

AGENCIES
Tokyo, September 9

JAPANESE PRIME Minister Junichiro Koizumi's coalition is on track to win a comfortable majority in the 480-seat lower house of parliament in Sunday's election, according to the latest poll. Koizumi's ruling Liberal Democratic Party has the support of 52 per cent of voters, compared with 34 per cent for the opposition Democratic Party of Japan, the latest survey by the *Nihon Keizai* newspaper shows.

The *Nihon Keizai* reported on its website on Friday that while the DPJ had narrowed the gap by 3 percentage points from last week's poll, the LDP still enjoyed majority support. The poll was conducted online

from Tuesday through to Thursday this week. The *Nihon Keizai* asked voters to name the party affiliations of the candidates they planned to vote for in their single-seat districts. Based on this, the survey found the LDP's approval rating dipped slightly from 54 per cent last week to 52 per cent this week. Support for the DPJ rose from 33 per cent to 34 per cent.

The *Nikkei* poll follows one on Wednesday by the conservative *Sankei* newspaper which also showed voters support Koizumi in his plans to privatise the postal system. The *Sankei* poll indicated the coalition of the LDP and the New Komeito party would win at least 252 seats. That would allow the coalition to chair all committees in the lower house, eas-

ing the passage of legislation.

On Friday, the *Asahi* newspaper said its polls indicated Koizumi's LDP would win at least 241 seats in parliament's 480-seat lower house. Other media polls published earlier in the week showed the LDP was headed for a majority on its own and that the two ruling parties together could win 269 seats.

Koizumi called the election after lawmakers in the LDP joined with the opposition last month to kill bills that would privatise the postal system, a financial giant with some \$3 trillion in assets that has been criticised for funding wasteful public works projects.

According to the *Nihon Keizai* poll, 27 per cent of voters with no party preference support Koizumi's postal privatisa-

tion plan. Thirteen per cent support the DPJ's alternative of reducing the size of Japan Post, but keeping it as a public entity. About 30 per cent are undecided.

Before Koizumi dissolved the parliament, the LDP had 249 seats, but he refused to give the 37 LDP rebels party backing for the election. New Komeito had 34 seats, giving the coalition a total of 283. The main opposition Democratic Party held 175.

The *Sankei* newspaper said on Wednesday that 20 to 30 per cent of respondents remained undecided, and noted that the random telephone survey of 43,530 voters carried out between September 1 to 4 might not accurately represent younger voters who only have mobile phones.

SEP 10 2005 THE HONG KONG TIMES

No AIDS, poisoning unlikely, just a stroke

First independent review of Arafat's medical records

STEVEN ERLANGER and
LAWRENCE K. ALTMAN
Jerusalem, September 8

THE MEDICAL records of Yasser Arafat, which have been kept secret since his unexplained death last year at a French military hospital, show that he died from a stroke that resulted from a bleeding disorder caused by an unidentified infection.

The first independent review of the records, obtained by *The New York Times*, suggests that poisoning was highly unlikely and dispels a rumor that he may have died of AIDS. Nonetheless, the records show that despite extensive testing, his doctors could not determine the underlying infection. Arafat seemed frail in his final months but not, by anyone's account, at death's door when he suddenly fell ill last October. After more than two weeks without improvement, he was airlifted to a French hospital, where he died on November 11. The cause of death was never announced and speculation has remained rife.

The records indicate that Arafat did not receive antibiotics until October 27, 15 days after the onset of his illness, which was originally diagnosed as "a flu." That was only two days before he was transferred to the Percy Army Teaching Hospital in Clamart, outside Paris, and it was probably too late to save him, according to Israeli and American experts consulted by *The Times*, who agreed to review the records on condition they not be named. His doctors in Ramallah also did not seem to recognize that he suffered from a serious blood disorder, disseminated intravascular coagulation, or DIC, which led to his death.

But even the French doctors never discovered the specific cause of the infection that led to the bleeding disorder, the records show. "It's a big puzzle," said a specialist in infectious diseases. The records make no mention of an AIDS test, an omission the experts found bizarre. An Israeli infectious disease specialist said he would have performed the test, if only to be thorough and to refute the rumors that surrounded the

case. He said news accounts during Arafat's illness made him strongly suspect that Arafat had AIDS. But after studying the records, he said that was improbable, given the sudden onset of the intestinal troubles.

A senior Palestinian official provided the medical records to Avi Isacharoff and Amos Harel, Israeli journalists who are working on a new edition of their book, *The Seventh War: How We Won and Why We Lost the War With the Palestinians*. They agreed to share the records in collaboration with *The Times*, which did its own investigation. Arafat's final illness began suddenly on the evening of October 12, when he vomited and had abdominal pain and diarrhea four hours after eating supper in his compound in Ramallah, where the Israelis had kept him isolated for three years.

These symptoms continued without fever for two weeks. He slipped into a stupor and lost 6 1/2 pounds. Arafat was treated for thrombocytopenia, an abnormally low platelet count, with transfusions of platelets and injections of gamma globulin.

Many senior Palestinian officials say Arafat was poisoned. In a recent telephone interview from Amman, Jordan, for example, Arafat's personal doctor, Ashraf al-Kurdi, said he believed Arafat was poisoned. But the newly released findings argue strongly against poisoning.

The French doctors sent specimens to three different laboratories for standard toxicology tests to detect metals and drugs like barbiturates, opiates and amphetamines. None were detected. The laboratories included the Toxicology Department of the Criminal Division of Physics and Chemistry in the Institute of Criminal Research of the National Gendarmerie; the Department of Clinical Biochemistry, Toxicology and Pharmacology at Percy; and the French Army's Radiotoxicology Control Laboratory. The researchers said Arafat did not suffer the extensive kidney and liver damage they would expect from a poison, although he did have jaundice.

The New York Times



Late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat blows kisses as he is helped out of a helicopter upon arriving in Amman last October in this image taken from video.

Opposition alleges irregularities

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak likely to win another six-year term

Atul Aneja

MANAMA: Egypt's long-time leader Hosni Mubarak is expected to win Wednesday's presidential elections by a wide margin amid allegations by Opposition groups of serious voting irregularities.

The Government hailed the polling as a success, though media reports suggested that voter turnout was low. Mr. Mubarak's strongest rival, Ayman Nour, said only 15 to 20 per cent of registered voters in the rural areas voted, while the turnout in the urban areas stood at 3 to 5 per cent. All results were expected by Saturday.

Nine candidates have challenged Mr. Mubarak, out of which Mr. Nour of the Ghad (Tomorrow) party and Nomaan Gomaa of the Wafd party are seen as serious contenders. The Wafd was once an active liberal party, and had played a key role in fighting for independence from Britain. It has weakened considerably due to political restrictions imposed during the past 50 years. Authorities have banned Muslim Brotherhood, the largest political group, from contest-



CELEBRATION TIME: Supporters of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak sing and dance in Cairo. - PHOTO: REUTERS

ing. Opposition parties have accused the Government of manipulating the polls.

Mr. Nour said the elections "are not fair at all" and that he knew of instances where voters were bribed. The Associated Press said election workers inside polling stations in Luxor in-

structed people to vote for Mr. Mubarak. In Alexandria, voters alleged that workers from the ruling National Democratic Party promised food to those who cast a ballot.

A spokesman for the Election Commission said they had not received any complaints. The

authorities had allowed equal air time on television to all contestants.

Analysts point out that Mr. Mubarak has a head start over other candidates as they are relatively unknown to the electorate on account of curbs on political activity that have lasted several decades. Besides, many voters have given weightage to "stability," which they hope Mr. Mubarak's Government can provide for the next six years.

Call for re-poll

CAIRO: Egyptian presidential candidate Ayman Nour said on Thursday he would call for a rerun of Wednesday's election, which monitors said was marred by fraud and widespread violations.

The Electoral Commission, which would have to order a new vote, has said it is immune from judicial review and rejected a previous court challenge by rights groups ahead of the vote. "We will call for ... a re-election," he said. - Reuters

Mubarak set to win landmark poll

More than 30 civil organisations to send voters as undercover election monitors

CAIRO: With the battle to keep his throne all but won, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's main struggle on the eve of Wednesday's landmark election was to secure a strong enough turnout to legitimise his victory.

Mr. Mubarak wrapped up his campaign for the country's first contested presidential election with an appeal to Egypt's 32 million voters to go to the polls but observers predict many could stay at home.

Appeal to voters

"The Hosni Mubarak speaking to you tonight is seeking the support of each and everyone of you," he told vast crowds in Cairo on Sunday on the final day of his campaign, which has been dominated by pledges to create more jobs and improve wages.

According to independent estimates, turnout reached barely 10 per cent in the previous elections won by the 77-year-old Mr. Mubarak, and observers suspect there will be no correlation between votes cast and the official result.

Uncertainty over the ability of independent observers to monitor the election because of a dispute between the Electoral Commission and the courts has fuelled fears of widespread vote-rigging. Until now, Egyptians had only been able to approve a single candidate, but Mr. Mubarak, who has ruled Egypt for 24 years, introduced pluralist elections earlier this year under intense international and domestic pressure.

With the four-term President known as "Rais" or "the boss" at little risk of being dragged into a second round showdown with one of his nine opponents, newspapers were rife with speculation on the turnout figure.

Official results are not expected for several days although a Mubarak win would likely be

confirmed before then. A member of Mr. Mubarak's campaign had said on condition of anonymity that 40 per cent would be "great result" but Opposition leaders and observers have charged that the incumbent would lack legitimacy if turnout fell short of 50 per cent.

The country's judges, tasked with supervising the polling process, relented on their threat to boycott the vote but warned they would not endorse the result if their demands for independence were not met.

They asked for independent monitors to be allowed inside polling stations, a demand rejected by the Electoral Commission, which Opposition leaders charge, is controlled by Mr. Mubarak's National Democratic Party.

More than 30 organisations involved in an unprecedented push by civil society for election transparency have drawn up plans to circumvent the ban by sending voters as undercover monitors. They are also planning to set up camp outside some polling stations and have handed out checklists and set up hotlines to report violations of electoral rules.

The challenger

After three weeks of campaigning, the fiery leader of the liberal Ghad party Ayman Nur emerged as the most serious challenge to Mr. Mubarak and his most virulent critic.

Although he managed to raise his profile as the leading Opposition candidate, many observers predict second spot could be clinched by Numan Gumaa, who chairs the liberal Wafd party.

Critics have charged Mr. Gumaa is a token Opposition candidate who was prodded into standing by Mr. Mubarak's ruling party to strip Mr. Nur of votes. — AFP

Egypt's presidential election candidates

President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak is favourite to win re-election in Egypt's first ever multi-candidate presidential elections



Hosni Mubarak, 77

Leader of ruling National Democratic Party

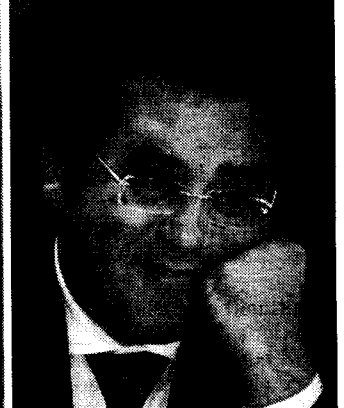
Assumed post after assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Ruled unchallenged, re-elected in yes-or-no referendums, but in February ordered Parliament to amend Constitution to allow first multi-candidate presidential election



Noaman Gomaa, 71

Former law school dean, heads New Wafd party

Under his leadership, Egypt's oldest party has suffered internal feuds, expelled two of its Parliament members and has only four Members of Parliament. May gain votes in cities of Port Said and Qena, where party has been strong for decades



Ayman Nour, 40

Leader of al-Ghad (Tomorrow) party

Youngest and most controversial challenger, the lawyer and journalist stirred debate by choosing orange as party colour in clear allusion to Ukraine's Orange Revolution. Certain to win votes in Cairo base, but appeal nationwide is unclear

OTHER CANDIDATES: Not expected to win large number of votes

Osama Shaltut: Solidarity party

Rifaat el-Agroudy: Accord party

Ahmed el-Sabahi: al-Ummah (Nation) party

Mamdouh Qenawi: Constitutional party

Fawzy Ghazal: Egypt 2000 party

Ibrahim Turk: Democratic Unionist party

Wahid el-Luxuri: Egypt Arab Socialist party

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Picture: Associated Press

Turmoil in Israel

Netanyahu throws his hat into the ring

The Middle East is passing through an extraordinary moment in history; a momentous development seems headed to be followed by a phase of political uncertainty. Within days of the landmark pullout from Gaza, Israel is in the melting pot again. Ariel Sharon's dramatic success in having achieved a prompt and bloodless withdrawal may eventually do him in. The ruling Likud Party has been shaken to its foundations with Benjamin Netanyahu's move to challenge Sharon in party primaries. The Mideast peace process may be off the rails again just when it appeared that the region had entered a watershed phase. Netanyahu is obviously cashing in on the resentment within Likud to the pullout. His supporters, predominant in the Likud central committee, have been strident in their criticism. Sharon has even been accused of creating a de facto Palestinian state. Going by the invectives, the contest is becoming increasingly personalised.

Opinion polls indicate that Netanyahu is far ahead of Sharon among registered voters. And the crisis could lead to the primaries being held as early as September 25 and the advancement of general elections scheduled for November 2006. Netanyahu wants hardliners to call the shots both within the party and government. Sharon is already under pressure from his supporters to float a centrist party with Likud moderates. A split might work to the detriment of Netanyahu; a splinter faction is bound to end up with fewer seats in Parliament. Ironically, the chaos may benefit the Labor Party; Ehud Barak has already projected Shimon Peres as "far preferable to Sharon and Netanyahu". This is the first-ever leadership challenge to a sitting Prime Minister in Israel. And the mood of his opponents is succinctly summed up by Netanyahu himself — "Sharon gave, and gave and gave, the Palestinians got, and got and got, and Israel got nothing, and nothing and nothing." Overall, these are murky waters.

Islamists fume as Pakistan PM defends Israel talks

AAMIR ASHRAF
ISLAMABAD, SEPT 2

PAKISTAN'S Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz defended Thursday's talks with Israel as Muslim clerics denounced the shift in policy in fiery sermons during Friday prayers, but planned street protests fell flat.

The meeting in Istanbul between Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri and his Israeli counterpart Silvan Shalom was the first publicly acknowledged high-level contact Pakistan has held with the Jewish state. "There is no harm in having talks," Aziz told the Lower House of the National Assembly, where Opposition Islamist legislators walked out in token protest.

Talking to reporters during a stopover in Dubai on Friday, Foreign Minister Khurshid Ahmed Kasuri said the move would give Pakistan "diplomatic space".

"We felt that withdrawal from Gaza was an important enough event for us to do something ... to encourage this process," he said. "Frankly (secret) contacts have been going on for decades, but we wanted to send a signal to the

Iran nuclear negotiator heads for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Iran's top nuclear negotiator is due to visit Pakistan soon, as part of Tehran's effort to head off sanctions over its controversial nuclear programme. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesman said Ali Larijani would arrive in Islamabad on Sunday evening or Monday morning. He is likely to discuss Iran's talks with the IAEA and the EU on Iran's nuclear cycle. REUTERS

Israeli government and people that the assumption that Islamic countries cannot live in peace with the Jewish state is not correct, if Israel were to vacate occupied territory," Kasuri said.

Kasuri said Islamabad would recognise Israel if it reached a settlement with the Palestinians. However, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said on Thursday this would only come after a Palestinian state was created.

Kasuri rejected Palestinian criticism of the talks, including by the militant Hamas group, saying Pakistan had acted after consultation with Palestinian leaders and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, Islam's birthplace. —Reuters

গাজা ফেরত এল ইহুদি নিয়ন্ত্রণ গেল না

গৌতম রায়

ভূমধ্যসাগরের তীরে প্যালেস্টাইনের ভূখণ্ড গাজা প্যালেস্টিনীয়রা আবার ফেরত পেতে চলেছেন ৩৮ বছর পর। ১৯৬৭ সালে আরব প্রতিবেশীদের বিরুদ্ধে যুদ্ধে যে সব জমি নবীন ইহুদি রাষ্ট্রটি দখল করে নিয়েছিল, তার মধ্যে গাজা আদি প্যালেস্টাইনের (যার বাকিটা ১৯৪৯ সালেই ইহুদিরা দখল করে) মাত্র দুই শতাংশ। যে ২১টি দখলদার ইহুদি বসতি তুলে দেওয়া হল, এরিয়েল শ্যারনেরাই সেগুলি বসিয়েছিলেন প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের কোণঠাসা করতে। ১৪ লক্ষ প্যালেস্টিনীয়র মাঝখানে এই পকেটগুলিতে ৮ হাজার ইহুদি বাস করতেন (একই ভাবে ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংকে ২৪ লক্ষ প্যালেস্টিনীয়কে কোণঠাসা করতে ইজরায়েল সুপারিকল্লিতভাবে ১২০টি ইহুদি বসতি গড়ে তোলে)।

গাজা এই ইহুদিদের অনেকেরই জন্মভূমি। আজ তা প্রবাস। উদ্বাস্ত জীবনের অনিশ্চয়তা তো ভবিষ্যতের ব্যাপার। টেনে-হিঁচড়ে জন্মভূমি থেকে উপড়ে ছুড়ে দেওয়া হলে তার অপমান ও যন্ত্রণা তৎক্ষণাৎ বেঁধে। ইহুদিরা তাই প্রাণপণ প্রতিরোধ করেছেন। টিল-পাটকেল-বোতল-বাল্ব-ভিম-আটার গুঁড়ো-রাম্মার তেল— হাতের কাছে যা পেয়েছেন, তাই ছুড়েছেন। চ্যাংদোলা করে তুলে নিয়ে গেলে চিল-চিংকার করে হাত-পা ছুড়েছেন। বৃদ্ধারা খাটের তলায়, রাম্মাঘরে, বৃদ্ধারা সিনাগগে, তরুণরা ছাদে কিংবা গাছের উপর। কিন্তু রেহাই পাননি কেউই। উচ্ছিন্ন ইহুদিরা সেনাদের কাছে কাতর আর্জি জানিয়েছেন, অভিশাপ দিয়েছেন, বিশ্বাসঘাতক বলে, 'হিটলারের নাতসি বর্বর' বলে গাল পেড়েছেন (যার চেয়ে খারাপ গালাগাল কোনও ইহুদিকে দেওয়া যায় না)। আর এ সবই সুপারিকল্লিত ভাবে, অনেক আঁচিটি বেধে আন্তর্জাতিক গণমাধ্যমে নিখিলভূবনময় প্রচারিত। সে জন্য সাড়ে তিন হাজার সাংবাদিক গাজায় হাজির হয়েছিলেন।

এটা ঠিকই যে, যে-সব ইহুদি পরিবারকে এখন উদ্বাস্ত হতে হচ্ছে, তারা রাষ্ট্রকে দস্তাপহারক ভাবছে। তাদের বসত করানোর সময় রাষ্ট্র তো বলেনি, একদিন এই প্রান্তরের নিজস্ব গান ছেড়ে আবার দাঁড়াতে হবে অনিশ্চয়ের মুখোমুখি। শিশুরা হারাবে তাদের খেলা-করার জগৎপারাবারের তীর, চেনা ধুলোমাটিঝোপ, প্রাপ্তবয়স্করা তাদের প্রিয় গাছতলা, পরিচিত চা-দোকান। এই হারানোর—বেদনা—

বহুমাত্রিক। তাই উদ্বাস্ত হতে না-চাওয়া যে-কোনও জনগোষ্ঠীর মতোই ইহুদি পরিবারগুলি মাটি কামড়ে থাকতে চেয়েছে। কিন্তু বেচারী ইজরায়েলকে একতরফা ভাবে এত ত্যাগ স্বীকার করতে হচ্ছে, আর প্যালেস্টিনীয়রা ফোকটে অনেক কিছু পেয়ে যাচ্ছে, ব্যাপারটা সে রকম নয়। বরং এ জমি তাদের কাছ থেকে কেড়ে নিয়েই এত কাল ভাগ করা হয়েছে, যেন গাজা এবং জর্ডন-তীরের পাহাড়-টিলা-মরুপ্রান্তর ইহুদিদেরই 'ঈশ্বর-প্রতিশ্রুত' ভূখণ্ড।

আর উচ্ছেদ? উচ্ছেদ না বলে একে পুনর্বাসন বলা উচিত। উচ্ছিন্ন প্রতিটি ইহুদি পরিবারকে দেড় থেকে চার লক্ষ মার্কিন ডলার দিচ্ছে ইজরায়েল। সেই সঙ্গে ভিলা, ছেড়ে আসা জবরদখলি প্যালেস্টিনীয় জমির চেয়ে তিন গুণ বেশি বাস্তু ও আবাদি। শুধু গাজার আট হাজার ইহুদিকে পুনর্বাসন দিতেই ইজরায়েল খরচ করছে ন'শো কোটি ডলার। তাই উৎখাত ইহুদি পরিবারের আবালবৃদ্ধবনিতার হাহাকারে দ্রবীভূত হওয়া কিংবা তাদের প্রতিরোধে খুব বেশি বীরত্ব বা আত্মত্যাগের গল্প খোঁজা অর্থহীন, যদিও মার্কিন-ইউরোপীয় গণমাধ্যম তেমনই রূপকথা রচনা করেছে। আসলে গাজার

এই উচ্ছেদ-কাণ্ডে এরিয়েল শ্যারনের সরকারের সঙ্গে ইহুদি দখলদারদের একটা গড়া-পেটা বা বোঝাপড়া লোকচক্ষুর আবডালে আগেই নিষ্পন্ন হয়েছিল। তাই প্রতিরোধের চিত্রনাট্যে যত নাটকীয়তা ও দেখনদারি ছিল, তত মরিয়া মর্মান্তিকতা ছিল না।

গাজা ইহুদিমুক্ত হলেও ইজরায়েলি সেনাবেষ্টনীতে ঘেরা বিজিত প্যালেস্টিনীয় জনজাতির 'বাস্তুস্তান'-এর অমর্যাদা বা কলঙ্ক তার ঘুচছে না। পদে-পদে বৈরি আধিপত্যকারীদের দ্বারা অবরুদ্ধ হয়ে থাকার যে দম-চাপা অসহায়তা থেকে প্যালেস্টিনীয় যুবকদের আল-আক্সা বিদ্রোহ বা 'ইস্তিফাদা-২', সে অবরোধ রাতারাতি ঘুচে যাচ্ছে না। ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংকের সোয়া দু লক্ষ ইহুদিকে সরানোর কোনও পরিকল্পনাই শ্যারনের নেই। তিনি নিজেই যে ওখানকার ৬৮টি ইহুদি বসতির স্থপতি। অথচ ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংক ইহুদিমুক্ত না হলে এবং গাজার সঙ্গে তা করিডরে সংযুক্ত না হলে প্যালেস্টাইন বাস্তুস্তানই হয়ে থাকবে। সর্বোপরি নিজেদের দৈনন্দিনের উপর প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের নিয়ন্ত্রণ থাকা দরকার। ইজরায়েল সেই নিয়ন্ত্রণ শিখিল করার, প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের আত্মশাসন মঞ্জুর করার কোনও আশু লক্ষণ দেখাচ্ছে না। বরং প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের গতিবিধির ওপর কড়া নজরদারির পরিকাঠামো অটুট রাখছে। তৈরি হচ্ছে পর-পর তিন সারি কাঁটাতারের মজবুত বেড়া, সাত ফুট উঁচু কংক্রিট পাঁচিল, প্রহরা বসছে গাজার লাগোয়া সিনাই উপত্যকা দিয়ে মিশরে প্রবেশের অলিন্দে। নজরদারি কখনও উঁচু পাহারা-পাঁচিলের মিনার থেকে, কখনও সমতলের চেক-পোস্ট, কখনও আবার গুপ্তচর মারফত। গাজার আকাশ-সীমা আগের মতো

ইজরায়েলের দখলেই থাকছে, কোনও প্যালেস্টিনীয় বিমানবন্দর বা বন্দর-জেটি সমুদ্রতীরে তৈরি করা যাবে না এবং বেলাভূমির তিন মাইল পর থেকে ভূমধ্যসাগরের দখলও থাকছে ইজরায়েলেরই।

তবু ইতিমধ্যেই মার্কিন প্রশাসন এবং তার প্রতিধ্বনি করে পশ্চিম দুনিয়া 'এই তো প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের বাসভূমি ফিরিয়ে দেওয়া হচ্ছে' বলে শ্যারনের পিঠ চাপড়ে দিচ্ছে। শ্যারন বা তাঁর পারিষদদের কাছে গাজার কোনও দাম কখনওই ছিল না। ১৯৬৭-র যুদ্ধে অগ্নিবর্ষের কাছ থেকে কেড়ে নেওয়া মোট ভূমির মাত্র ছয় শতাংশ এই গাজা। ইহুদি ধর্ম বা পুরাণের কোনও উল্লেখযোগ্য ঘটনার সঙ্গে এই জমির ঘাসপাতাউষ্মরতা যৌথ অবচেতনের কৌম মননে সংশ্লিষ্ট নয়। ভূমধ্যসাগরের লবণাধুরাশি (যার ওপর দখল তো থাকছেই) শ্বাড়া কোনও

প্রাকৃতিক সম্পদেও সমৃদ্ধ নয় গাজা। মরুদ্যানবিরল, অনাবাদি, বুলডোজারক্ষা এই ঈশ্বরপরিত্যক্ত ভূমির প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের ৭৭ শতাংশই বাস করে দারিদ্রসীমার নীচে, আর তাদের অবমাননীয় দিনযাপনের জমিনেই আবাদ হয় হামাস-এর ধর্মধ্বজী বিদ্রোহ। তা'দমন করার খরচও অনেক। শ্যারনের তাই গাজা চাই না। চাই ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংক আর জেরুজালেম। কোনও মূল্যেই ইজরায়েল এই দুই 'পবিত্র, প্রতিশ্রুত পুণ্যভূমি' প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের হাতে সঁপে দেবে না। বরং সেখানে ইহুদি বসতির সংখ্যা ও জৈব প্রজননের হার বাড়িয়ে প্যালেস্টিনীয়দের সংখ্যালঘু করে তুলবে। ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংকে ইতিমধ্যেই চার লক্ষ ইহুদি ঢুকিয়ে দিয়েছে ইজরায়েল আর পূর্ব জেরুজালেমে প্যালেস্টিনীয়রা এখনই দু'লক্ষ ইহুদির ঘেরাওয়ে দ্বিতীয় শ্রেণির নাগরিক। স্বাধীন প্যালেস্টাইনের রাজধানী হওয়ার ভবিতব্য তার দূরপর্যাহত। এ জন্যই প্যালেস্টিনীয়রা খুশি হলেও উচ্ছ্বাসে প্রগলভ নন। গাজার 'মুক্ত স্বদেশে' নবনির্মাণের তাড়নায় তাঁরা ভুলে যাচ্ছেন না, ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংক ও জেরুজালেম হাসিল হতে না দেওয়ার ইজরায়েলি শপথের রক্তাক্ত সম্ভাবনা।

**প্যালেস্টিনীয়রা খুশি
হলেও উচ্ছ্বাসে প্রগলভ
নন। গাজার 'মুক্ত
স্বদেশে' নবনির্মাণের
তাড়নায় তাঁরা ভুলে
যাচ্ছেন না, ওয়েস্ট ব্যাংক
ও জেরুজালেম হাসিল
হতে না দেওয়ার
ইজরায়েলি শপথের
রক্তাক্ত সম্ভাবনা।**

In and out of Gaza

5/28/05 Coping with a depleted inheritance

The recent watershed development in the Middle East brings with it a huge challenge that the Palestinian Authority must now face. And that could be the next chapter in the politics of the region. The Israeli pullout from Gaza has been prompt and bloodless much to the credit of Ariel Sharon. Thus far the Palestinian response has been equally swift and admirable. Indeed, the weekend decree signed by Mahmoud Abbas is a historic move on behalf of the Palestinian Authority for the control of Gaza, post-evacuation. In one stroke, he has been able to dispel fears of ordinary Palestinians that the Palestinian Authority will seize the settlement lands for personal use. Still more fearsome could be a possible land grab movement by the Hamas. He has formed two committees — represented by both the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad — that will act as a buffer against a bloody scramble for the 70 square kilometres of prime land left behind by an estimated 8,500 Jewish settlers. The safeguards have been well thought through: the committees will monitor the distribution of resources and individual land claims. Supremacy of the law seems guaranteed as courts will be the final arbiter in cases relating to individual claims.

These measures pertaining to land rights are doubtless a good beginning. The real test, however, of the Palestinian Authority will be on the judicious use of the Strip. Which, after all, is a depleted inheritance. The devastated infrastructure will first have to be revived. And it must at the end of the day benefit Gaza's predominantly poverty-stricken 1.3 million population that will have to contend with inadequate housing and chronic water shortage. The Palestinian Authority has already earmarked certain strategic settlements that could be developed to rebuild homes destroyed by the Israeli army or to serve as an adjunct to the port. Agriculture is another factor as the task at hand is essentially economic. Towards that end, the proper use of the assets of Gaza hinges largely on the "safe passage" through and from the West Bank. Even if there is some headway before the Palestinian legislative council elections in January, it will be no mean feat for Mahmoud Abbas.

26 APR 2005 THE STATESMAN

Challenge of Israeli unilateralism

Parallel unilateralism can build self-rule without concessions.

Ahmad Samih Khalidi

TWO PROFOUND assumptions underlie Ariel Sharon's withdrawal from Gaza. The first is that Israel's overriding value is the preservation of its Jewish character and majority. The second is that the conflict with the Palestinians is not amenable to a final agreed resolution, now or in the foreseeable future.

The net product is that Israel should unilaterally "disengage" from areas of Palestinian population density and retrench behind a demographic barrier (the wall). Withdrawal from Gaza represents a retreat from no more than six per cent of the territories occupied in 1967, but it reduces the Palestinian "demographic threat" by about a third.

Gaza will now be enclosed in a triple fence, and with the completion of the "separation wall" in the West Bank in mid-2006, Israel's five million or so Jews will be insulated from the 3.8 million Palestinians in the occupied territories — with tens of thousands of Arabs in East Jerusalem suspended in a politico-legal limbo.

Joy at deliverance

No Palestinian patriot can fail to be moved by the Gazans' joy at deliverance from 38 years of ugly occupation. But the withdrawal highlights two vital characteristics of the coming phase in the Palestinian-

Israeli conflict. First, unilateralism has replaced negotiation; second, conflict management has replaced conflict resolution.

Unilateralism was Mr. Sharon's response to the need to act, maintain the initiative and keep creating facts on the ground. There is little conviction today on any side that a return to Camp David-style final negotiations could lead to anything but failure. For the Palestinians there is no self-evident paradigm to replace that of a comprehensive negotiated settlement based on a two-state solution that involves a resolution of outstanding issues, including a return to 1967 borders, more or less, a capital in East Jerusalem, and a settlement of the refugee problem.

The prevailing winds after Gaza will not be towards this classic two-state solution. The international community has already effectively opted for a new interim phase disguised under the rubric of a Palestinian state "with provisional borders," as specified in the so-called road map.

This posits a test of Palestinian good governance as a precondition for progress to a final settlement, and contemplates a deferral of vital issues such as the future of refugees and the holy city of Jerusalem until some unspecified date.

But no Palestinian leadership can accept a state with provisional borders that defers these two most emotive issues. Any leader

who accepts this would be immediately faced with strong and possibly violent opposition, not only from Islamist and nationalist elements in Palestine itself, but from the refugee and diaspora constituencies.

PA in a quandary

This leaves the Palestinian Authority/ PLO in a quandary. Final-status negotiations (even if Israel agreed to them) are unlikely to produce a stable resolution. But a new interim phase risks deep internal splits and jeopardises inalienable Palestinian rights regarding Jerusalem and refugees.

There is one potential alternative, and that is to adopt a policy of "parallel unilateralism." This builds on Mr. Sharon's unilateral approach and turns it to the Palestinians' advantage.

If the essence of unilateralism is the ability to act free from mutual constraints and obligations, then the Palestinians could benefit from Israeli unilateral acts by absorbing whatever territories are vacated, developing their means of self-rule and building up their capabilities without the shackles of Israeli pre-conditions. This would entail no concessions on vital rights or points of principle.

It is still very unclear how any Israeli unilateral process will continue on the West Bank and how "success" in Gaza will be judged on both sides. But as the deep logic of Israel's demographic fears and the absence

of an agreed final settlement will continue to impress themselves on both parties, parallel unilateralism may be the only temporary, if as yet fuzzy, way out.

Barring unforeseen circumstances, the West Bank separation wall will be completed. Israel will have to decide what will go behind it and what will remain implanted deep in Palestinian soil. The latter will be unsustainable and will be withdrawn sooner or later.

The Palestinians will be left with large chunks of the West Bank and all of Gaza. From this perspective it would be better not to accept a "state within provisional borders" and maintain the Palestinian Authority as the governing authority as long as land is occupied and the refugee issue and Jerusalem are left pending.

But the conflict will not be resolved. The issues outstanding will fester and generate constant friction. There will be new calls for armed struggle inside Palestine and from the diaspora.

Israel will respond in kind, and the whole affair will be but a new page in the conflict. A cynic would argue that this would be true to the existential nature of a struggle that has already straddled three centuries. —

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(Ahmad Samih Khalidi is a former Palestinian negotiator and senior associate member of St Antony's College, Oxford University.)

Handwritten notes: "M. Khalidi" and "10/11/05" with a circled "2" and a signature.

Handwritten text: "THE END" with a flourish.

No trace of WMD programme in Iran: US experts

9/7
DAFNA LINZER

TRACES of bomb-grade uranium found two years ago in Iran came from contaminated Pakistani equipment and is not evidence of a clandestine nuclear weapons program, a group of US government experts and other international scientists has determined.

"The biggest smoking gun that everyone was waving is now eliminated with these conclusions," said a senior official who discussed the still-confidential findings on the condition of anonymity. Scientists from the United States, France, Japan, Britain and Russia met in secret during the past nine months to pore over data collected by inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, according to US and foreign officials.

Recently, the group, whose existence had not been previously reported, definitively matched samples of the highly enriched uranium—a key ingredient for a nuclear weapon—with centrifuge equipment turned over by the government of Pakistan.

Iran has long contended that the uranium traces were the result of contaminated equipment bought years ago from Pakistan. But the Bush administration had pointed to the material as evidence that Iran was making bomb-grade ingredients. The conclusions will be shared with IAEA board members in a report due out the first week in September, according to US and European officials

Iran N-talks off

PARIS: European powers have called off the August 31 talks with Iran over its nuclear programme, France said on Tuesday, marking a breakdown in two years of negotiations with Tehran to halt its sensitive atomic work. French Foreign Ministry spokesman Jean-Baptiste Mattei said talks on a formal European proposal made earlier this month would not now go ahead because Iran had resumed certain nuclear work in breach of a promise to freeze it while talks lasted.

REUTERS

who agreed to discuss details of the investigation on the condition of anonymity.

The report "will say the contamination issue is resolved," a Western diplomat said.

US officials have privately acknowledged for months that they were losing confidence that the uranium traces would turn out to be evidence of a nuclear weapons program.

US officials, eager to move the Iran issue to the UN Security Council, which has the authority to impose sanctions, have begun a new round of briefings for allies designed to convince them that Iran's real intention is to use its energy program as a cover for bomb building.

The briefings will focus on the White House's belief that a country with as much oil as Iran would not need an energy program on the scale it is planning, according to two officials. —LAT/WP

'We want to start building'

Jerusalem, August 23

ISRAEL'S WITHDRAWAL from the Gaza Strip presents a historic opportunity for the Palestinians and could form the cornerstone of a future state, a senior Palestinian official said on Tuesday. "This is a momentous and very important point in history for us, but now we want to start building," said Rafiq Hussein, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas' chief of staff.

Israeli forces completed the evacuation of 21 Gaza settlements and four West Bank settlements on Tuesday. It plans to hand Gaza over to Palestine.

Hussein said it was crucial

that the Palestinians create a viable government in Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal is complete. "We see that we have to perform well in Gaza and ensure that we put the first construction stones for the Palestinian state," he said.

Gaza has been beset by lawlessness in recent months as rival groups jockey for power there. The withdrawal presented the Palestinians the opportunity to focus on nation building, Hussein said.

"We'll create institutions, we'll create accountability and transparency in dealing with the land that's going to be evacuated by the settlers," Hussein said. "But mostly what we

have to do is create jobs for people and this is what the government is bent on doing, giving people hope for the future and giving them some economic prosperity for the future," he said.

Hussein also said that once they evacuations were complete, the Palestinians would push for a return to negotiations with Israel.

Both sides have committed to the internationally backed "road map" peace plan that envisions a Palestinian state alongside Israel. But implementation has been long dormant with both sides failing to carry out their obligations.

AP

THE INDUSTRIAL TIMES

Hammas vows to continue fight

AD-12

Gunmen take over Gaza City's central square

GAZA CITY: In a challenge to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, dozens of masked Hamas gunmen took over Gaza City's central square on Saturday and announced they would not stop attacks on Israel, despite that country's ongoing withdrawal from Gaza Strip.

Mr. Abbas, who is under intense international pressure to disarm militant groups, has been urging them not to flaunt their weapons in public.

However, even the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, a group with ties to Mr. Abbas' ruling Fatah movement, has largely ignored his appeal.

Police stand by

On Saturday, several dozen Hamas gunmen took over Gaza's central square and closed all entrances to it.

Police personnel approached, but did not interfere as the gunmen announced they would not lay down their arms.

"This retreat does not mean the end of our battle, but it is the beginning," said a spokesman for the Hamas military wing, who identified himself only by his *nom-de-guerre*, Abu Obai-

deh. "Our battle with the (Israeli) enemy is long and will continue," Abu Obaidah said, addressing a group of some 40 armed and masked Hamas members who had gathered in a square outside the Palestinian Parliament building.

Polls on January 25
Palestinian parliamentary elections will be held January 25, Mr. Abbas announced on Saturday.

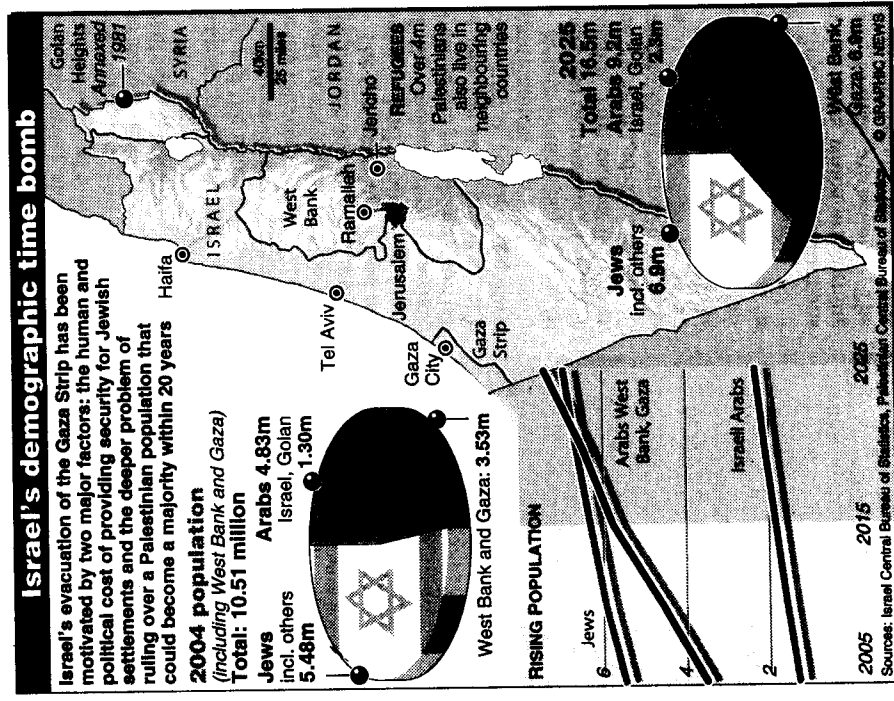
The elections were to have been held in July, but were postponed indefinitely because of Israel's Gaza pullout.

In setting a firm date, Mr. Abbas was making a conciliatory gesture to his political rival, Hamas, which is expected to make a strong showing in the vote.

"The parliamentary election will take place in all of the homeland districts on Wednesday, January 25, 2006," Mr. Abbas told a "model parliament" of high school students in Gaza City on Saturday. — AP

screaming from synagogues by unarmed soldiers, only four of the 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip remain.

The removal of settlements is the first from land that Palestinians want for a state under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan for "disengagement" from Washington as a possible step to peace. — Reuters



Jordan traces rocket launcher used in Aqaba

ASSOCIATED Press
Aqaba, August 20

JORDANIAN AUTHORITIES have found the launcher that fired three Katyusha rockets from a hilltop warehouse, including one that narrowly missed a US naval ship docked at this Red Sea resort, Jordan's interior minister Awni Yirfas said on Saturday.

The most serious strike against the US Navy since the USS Cole bombing in Yemen nearly five years ago killed a Jordanian soldier on Friday, wounded another and sparked a nationwide manhunt for the culprits. Two other rockets were fired toward Israel from the same warehouse, which is located in the hills on Aqaba's northern edge, about 5 miles from the port. One fell short and hit the wall of a Jordanian military hospital and the other landed inside Israel close to Eilat airport, lightly wounding a taxi driver.

"We have found the rocket launcher in the warehouse from where they fired," Yirfas said. The find was one of the first key breakthroughs in the investigation. "The investigation is still underway and issues related to it will remain secret so it would not harm the process," Yirfas said. "I cannot give you the names or say if we are looking for the perpetrators in the desert or any other place."

Jordanian security forces are looking for six people, including one Syrian and several Egyptians and Iraqis, who are believed to have escaped in a vehicle with Kuwaiti license plates after firing the rockets. Mystery surrounds the source of the rockets, several thousand of which are believed to be in the possession of Lebanon's Shia Muslim militant group, Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran and Syria. Jordanian officials have not yet commented on where they think the rockets originated from nor on who might have provided them.

An al-Qaida-linked group, the

RED SEA TERROR

- The blasts in the resort town of Taba in October 2004 were the first terror attacks in the peaceful Sinai region
- Sharm-el-Sheikh saw a series of blasts on July 22, a day after the failed bombing of the London transport system
- The recent roadside blast in northern Sinai targeted a vehicle belonging to the Multinational Force and Observers

Abdullah Azzam Brigades, said in an Internet statement that it staged the attack, but the claim could not be authenticated. The same group was among several militant organisations that claimed responsibility for terror bombings in three Egyptian Sinai Peninsula resorts during the past year, which killed around 100 people.

Jordan's King Abdullah II, who is in Russia on a state visit, condemned Friday's attacks. "This criminal attack will not deter Jordan from carrying out the true message of Islam, which terrorists are trying to distort," Abdullah said in a statement carried by the state-run Petra news agency.

The rocket firings deepened concerns about new Islamic militant activity in a sleepy corner of West Asia usually known for beach vacations and Israel-Arab peacemaking. The tourist resort of Aqaba, on Jordan's tiny strip of coastline, is wedged next to Israel at the northern end of the Red Sea.

Despite the attacks, shopkeepers in Aqaba said it was business as usual on Saturday, with beaches and seaside cafes packed with foreigners and Jordanians and the resort's streets crowded. Hotels reported no mass cancellations or early departures.

21 AUG 2005

Troops clear Gaza synagogue

REUTERS

Gadid, August 19

ISRAELI TROOPS pushed through burning barricades and dragged screaming protesters from a settlement synagogue on Friday in an assault on one of the last pockets of resistance to evacuation from the Gaza Strip.

Diehard settlers took to rooftops in the tiny Gadid enclave shouting "Nazis" as forces swept in, hours after clearing Gaza's main anti-pullout strongholds and all but breaking the back of opposition to ending 38 years of occupation.

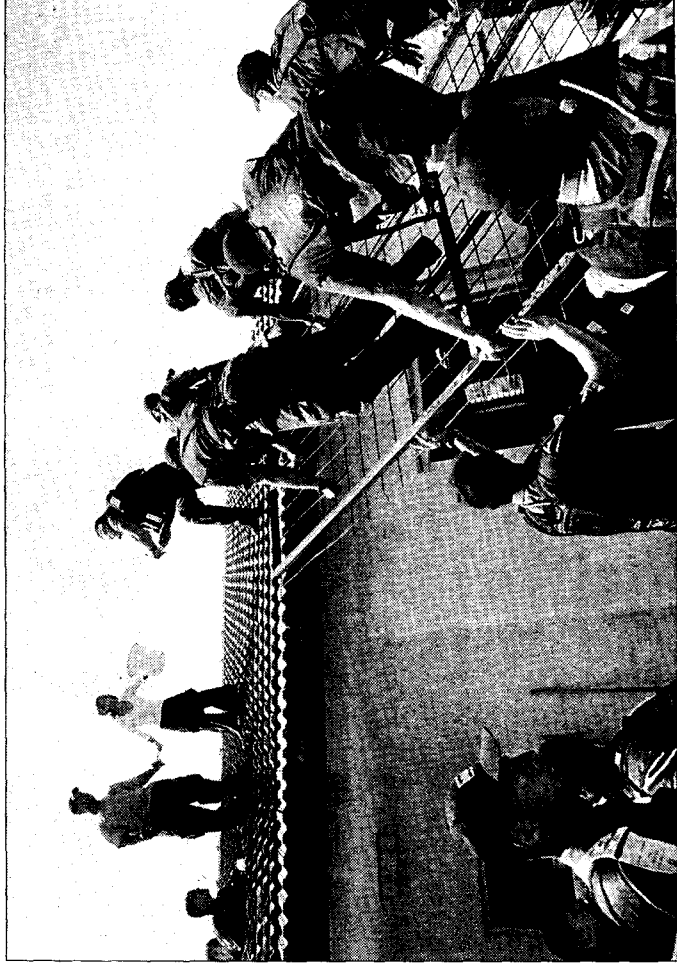
With the latest poll confirming solid support among the Israeli public for the first removal of settlements from land Palestinians want for a state, troops rushed to wrap up their toughest tasks before the start of the Jewish Sabbath at sunset.

Marching past flaming cars, unarmed riot troops surrounded Gadid's synagogue and forced their way in as 90 protesters, mostly radical youths who had locked themselves inside, lay on the floor. Some prayed. Others cried or shouted abuse.

In what has become a familiar scene this week, police wrestled them out one by one and carried them to waiting buses—as they had in raids on two other enclaves on Thursday.

"This is a desecration of everything that is sacred to Jews," said Boaz Puterel, 30, echoing the belief of ultranationalist Israelis that the Gaza Strip is part of God's gift to the Jewish people and should never be relinquished.

More than 80 percent of Gaza's 8,500 settlers have been evacuated under Prime Min-



AP

Israeli police evict a family from their home in the Jewish settlement of Gadid on Friday.

ister Ariel Sharon's "disengagement plan", and officials said the operation could be completed by Tuesday, far ahead of schedule.

Many of Gadid's 350 residents had already left before troops moved in, but a few families and dozens of protesters defiantly remained. Columns of smoke rose from piles

of burning tires and debris as soldiers went door to door ordering people out.

One man who lay spread-eagled on a doorstep had to be revived by soldiers with smelling salts. Police stood atop their vehicles to pluck a few radical youths from red-tiled roofs.

Israel drags settlers out of Gaza Strip

ASSOCIATED Press
Neve Dekalim (Gaza Strip), August 17

ISRAELI TROOPS dragged sobbing Jewish settlers out of homes, synagogues and even a nursery school on Wednesday and hauled them onto buses in a massive evacuation, fulfilling Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's promise to withdraw from the Gaza Strip after a 38-year occupation. Israeli troops entered Gaza's largest synagogue on Wednesday to remove hundreds of worshippers, who had formed long lines and swayed in prayer. In an emotional show of unity, soldiers wearing flak jackets joined the ranks of the worshippers.

Soldiers carried away worshippers still wrapped in their white prayer shawls. Wailing men ripped their shirts in a Jewish mourning ritual. Women in a synagogue pressed their faces against the curtain covering the Torah scroll. A woman set herself on fire at a police roadblock in Israel.

In Gaza, settlers kicked and screamed as they were loaded onto buses. One woman in Neve Dekalim shouted, "I don't want to! I don't want to!" as she was carried away.irate residents in one outpost employed Nazi-era imagery — including stars of David on their T-shirts — to protest the military's actions. But there were no signs of serious violence in the settlements as a growing number of residents appeared to be coming to terms with the withdrawal. "I believed that God would not let this happen, but this is not true," a woman said in the isolated settlement of Morag while clutching her baby.

Sharon, who championed the settlements for years, said the images of settlers being removed from their homes were heartbreaking. "It's impossible to watch this, and that includes myself, without tears in the eyes," he told a news conference. But he urged settlers to show restraint. "I'm appealing to everyone. Don't attack the men and women in uniform. Don't accuse them. Don't make it harder for them, don't harm them. Attack me. I am responsible for this. Attack me. Accuse me," Sharon said.

The operation capped a bruising political battle for Sharon, who proposed the withdrawal more than 18 months ago as a way to reduce friction with the Palestinians. Opponents accuse him of caving in to Palestinian violence and abandoning the dream of full control over the biblical Land of Israel.

Throughout the day, some 14,000 troops entered six Jewish settlements: Morag, Neve Dekalim, Bedolah, Ganei Tal, Tel Katifa and Kerem Atzmona. In several settlements, including the largest — Neve Dekalim, army commanders were trying to persuade residents to leave voluntarily.

Security officials said the goal was to clear out the 21 Gaza settlements in just a few days, far more quickly than originally planned. But thousands of pullout opponents who infiltrated Gaza in recent weeks remained.

In Neve Dekalim, a grizzled colonel, with tears in his eyes, shook hands with a young father, cradling the man's tiny baby, as he explained it was time to go. Another commander, identified only as Yitzhak, tearfully hugged another settler.



Israeli soldiers carry a Jewish settler at Neve Dekalim.

Jews of Indian origin resigned to their fate

Eshkol (Israel), August 17

INDIANS IN Neveh Dekalim settlement of Gaza said they had "accepted their fate" and were ready to leave as thousands of Israeli security forces entered the area to evict Jewish settlers who refused to move out voluntarily.

"It is unthinkable for us to fight against our own army. What is depressing is the way our contribution to this country has been ignored and how we have been made to look like miscreants," Avin Gangte, the leader of the Bnei Menashe community, hailing from Manipur and Mizoram, said. Indians form the single largest immigrant community in the Gaza Strip.

"Evacuation looks inevitable and we can't get violent against our own people. There have been clashes here since the morning

but we have accepted this fate and will move out if that's what the government wants," said a community member who refused to be identified.

"Police scuffled with a large crowd, grabbed settlers and pushed them into buses," Amos, a witness, said. Police arrested about 20 protesters and put them on a bus. Gangte said that they are likely to be taken to Mirkaz Shapira, near Gaza, first and then moved to hotels in Ashkelon in the South of Israel and Jerusalem.

Some nine families from the Indian community, which were related to each other, had left for the northern part of Israel a few weeks ago but the overwhelming majority chose to stay put. About 210 of the 470 families in Neveh Dekalim had already left by midnight on Tuesday, official sources said.

PTI

18 AUG 2005

GAZA STRIP ■ Sharon takes the blame as Israeli soldiers break down doors to evict settlers from their homes

ARMY DRAGS SETTLERS OUT OF GAZA

MARK HEINRICH

NEVE DEKALIM, GAZA STRIP, AUGUST 17

ISRAELI troops dragged settlers screaming and sobbing from homes and synagogues on Wednesday, beginning a forced evacuation of Gaza settlements after nearly four decades of occupation.

Thousands of unarmed soldiers marched door-to-door in six Jewish enclaves, ordering people out and in some cases breaking down doors when they refused. Police grabbed protesters off the streets and pushed them into waiting buses.

A West Bank settler opposed to the pullout set herself on fire at a checkpoint outside the Gaza Strip, suffering burns to 60 per cent of her body. Ultranationalist Israelis see the West Bank and Gaza as land bequeathed to the Jews by God.

"I don't want to. I don't want to," one woman wept as four female soldiers, each grabbing a limb, carried her out of her home in Neve Dekalim, the largest Gaza enclave.

In one synagogue, radical youths who had slipped into the main settlement bloc sang the haunting melody some Jews sang on their way to Nazi gas chambers. But elsewhere there were increasing signs of settlers resigning themselves to evacuation as they tearfully hugged soldiers before filing quietly onto buses taking them to Israel.

The operation, the culmination of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan for the first removal of settlements from land Palestinians want for a state, began after a midnight deadline for the remaining Gaza settlers to leave or face eviction. Palestinians watched from nearby rooftops.

Sharon, once the settlers' champion but now reviled by them as a traitor, voiced sympathy for the evacuees in a televised address. He urged them to blame him alone and not attack troops. "I am responsible for this. Attack me," said Sharon.

But confrontation loomed as forces fanned out among the red-roofed villas of Neve Dekalim, where the hundreds of radical youths were in the synagogue for a possible last stand.

When a family of five refused to open their door, soldiers broke it

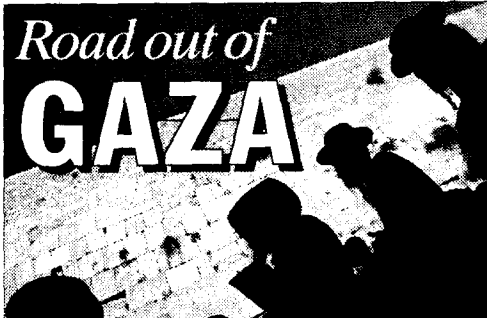


Israeli soldiers breaking open the door to a settler's home in Neve Dekalim in Gaza on Wednesday. Reuters

down and carried them out, including a young girl.

"Guys, why are you doing this," cried a man named Yehuda who stood on his rooftop wearing his old military uniform in the Morag settlement after troops, accompanied by bulldozers, made their way past makeshift barricades and marched in. Smoke from tyre and rubbish fires billowed over the area.

After a standoff at Morag's synagogue, soldiers carried away wor-



shippers wrapped in prayer shawls and still chanting dirges.

Bulldozers were seen moving in and demolishing buildings vacated by settlers in the northern Gaza settlement of Nissanit.

Israeli officials raised the prospect of settlers in as little as two days, speeding up an operation the military had said it hoped to complete by September 4.

—Reuters

Palestinians celebrate as Israeli settlers removed

NIDAL AL-MUGHRABI
DEIR AL-BALAH, GAZA STRIP, AUGUST 17

GLEEFUL Palestinians cheered and laughed from rooftops and windows on Wednesday as they watched Israeli troops move into the Gaza Strip to force Jewish settlers from the occupied territory.

"Of course I am happy. I saw at least 500 Israeli soldiers arriving at Tel Katifa to kick settlers out," said 51-year-old Mohammad al-Salqawi, a farmer whose shabby house looks out on the small settlement nearby.

"I will take my land back. I lost greenhouses which were demolished to make room for the settlement," said Salqawi, dressed in a traditional baggy jalabeya. Some of his 16 children scampered nearby to get a better view.

Gaza's 1.4 million Palestinians have resented nothing more than the presence of the 8,500 settlers behind walls and razor wire to

protect against militant attacks.

"I feel like I could fly, I am so happy," said Abu Ahmed, a father of 10, whose house was demolished by Israeli troops during the uprising as he watched from the roof of his house in Khan Younis, next door to the main settlement of Neve Dekalim. "Today their houses are being demolished and they are being driven out of Gaza. It is payback time," he said.

Hamas militants, who claim the pullout as a victory for the uprising, put up posters on Gaza City walls showing a masked gunman striding across crumbling settlements. Israeli opponents of the pullout also say it rewards violence. There was little echo of the Gaza celebrations in the West Bank though—the other occupied territory that Palestinians want for a state.

"We shouldn't exaggerate celebrations," said Sameer al-Bakri, a 42-year-old driver in Hebron. "We can't celebrate because Israel is creating facts on the ground in the West Bank. How can we celebrate a big lie." —Reuters

Indians to leave Neveh Dekalim settlement

HARINDER MISHRA
ESHKOL (ISRAEL), AUGUST 17

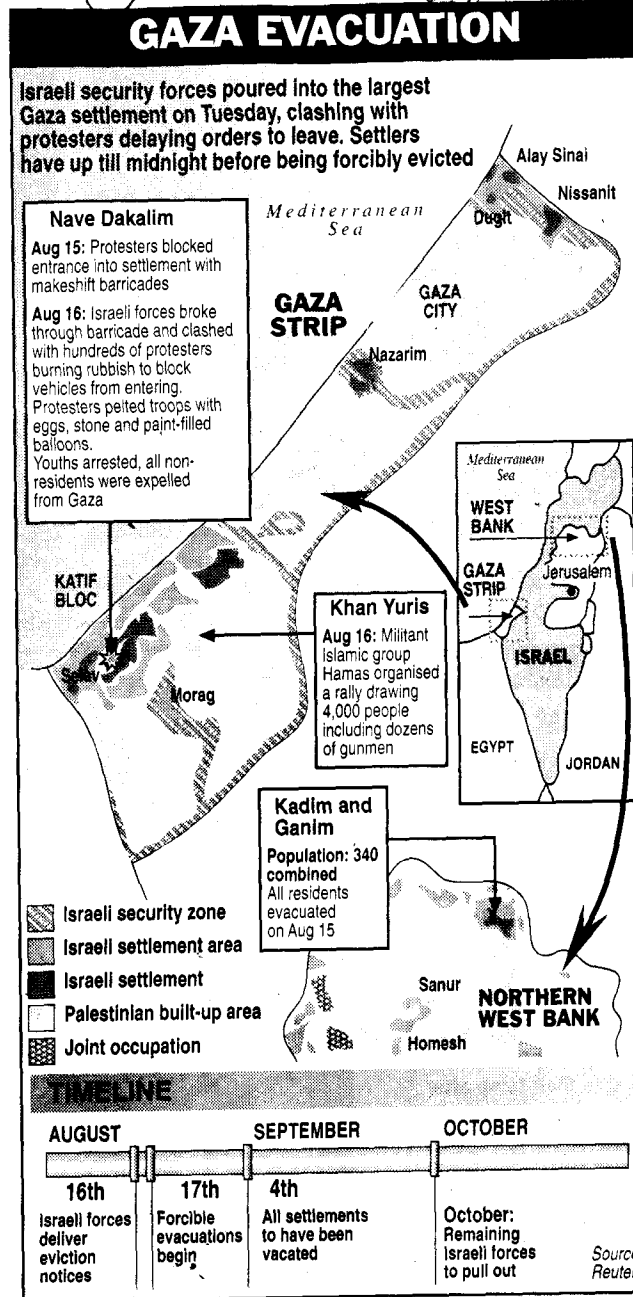
INDIANS in Neveh Dekalim settlement of Gaza strip said they had "accepted their fate" and were ready to leave as thousands of Israeli security forces entered the area to evict Jewish settlers who refused to move out voluntarily.

"It is unthinkable for us to fight against our own Army. What is depressing is the way our contribution to this country has been ignored and how we have been made to look like miscreants," said Avin Gangte, the leader of the Bnei Menashe community, hailing from Manipur and Mizoram. Gangte said that they are likely to be taken to Mirkaz Shapira, near Gaza, first and then moved out to hotels in Ashkelon in the south of Israel and Jerusalem.

Some nine families from the group, which were related to each other, had left for the northern part of Israel a few weeks back but the overwhelming majority chose to stay back, resisting the evacuation plan. Indians form the single largest immigrant community in the Gaza strip.

"Evacuation looks inevitable and we can't get violent against our own people. There have been clashes here since the morning but we have accepted this fate and will move out if that's what the government wants," a community member said. Students of the Torat Haim Yeshiva in Neveh Dekalim, which had seen violent protests earlier, were surprisingly packing when the troops arrived.

About 210 of the 470 families



IE Graphics/B.K. SHARMA

in Neveh Dekalim had already left by midnight yesterday, official sources said.

The more than 15,000 police officers and soldiers deployed in Gush Katif also marched into the Gaza settlements of Ganei Tal, Bedolah and Tel Katifa to begin the forced evacuation. Israeli security forces have encountered violent resistance from settlers and pullout opponents who had infiltrated into this largest settlement of the Gaza strip.

The protesters, who were opposing the Israeli pullout, threw

eggs and water bottles at security force personnel as they entered the area to forcibly evict them following the expiry of the deadline to leave the settlement voluntarily.

"Police scuffled with a large crowd, grabbed settlers and pushed them into buses," a witness said. Police arrested about 20 protesters and placed them on a bus. The Army is allowing those settlers who don't clash with the security forces to leave the settlements in their own cars. —PTI

History of Gaza Strip:

► **GAZA:** Israel has begun evacuating settlers from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank, its first withdrawal from occupied territory that Palestinians want for a state. Here are facts about Gaza's history and current conditions:

- Gaza is an arid, sliver-like wedge of territory at the southeast end of the Mediterranean Sea, about 45 km long and 10 km wide. It borders Israel to the north and east, and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula to the south
- About 1.4 million Palestinians live in Gaza, more than half of them families of refugees from past wars with Israel. Gaza has one of the world's highest population densities and demographic growth rates
- Most Gazans live under a poverty

line of \$2 a day. Unemployment exceeds 50 per cent because of Israeli security closures curbing cross-border trade and access to jobs

► Concrete slums, facades covered by murals of Palestinian militants slain by Israel, sprawl across sand dunes dotted by palm groves and mounds of uncollected trash. Donkey-carts for transport have made a comeback because of impoverishment. Splendid beachfronts provide a rare recreational respite

► Gaza has been continuously inhabited for more than 3,000 years. It was a crossroads of ancient civilisations and strategic outpost on the Mediterranean. The Bible says Samson died in Gaza while destroying the Temple of the Philistines

► It is believed to be the burial place of the Prophet Mohammed's grand-



All that remains now are deserted homes along deserted streets in Nissanit in northern Gaza Strip after the disengagement. Reuters

father and the birthplace in the 8th century of Imam al-Shafa'i, a giant of Islamic jurisprudence

► The Ottoman Empire ruled Gaza for hundreds of years until World War-I when it became part of British Mandate Palestine. It came under Egyptian control in 1948 during the Arab-Israeli war that led to Israel's creation

► Gaza's population tripled in 1948-49 when it absorbed about a quarter of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees fleeing areas now part of Israel

► Under Egyptian administration, Gaza became a key breeding ground for militant Palestinian opposition to Israel

into the territory in the early 1970s

► Palestine Liberation Organisation guerrillas were active in Gaza in 1967-70, leading to Israeli Army crackdowns and demolitions in refugee camps. Fighting abated by 1972

► The first Palestinian Intifada (uprising) began in Gaza in December 1987 after an Israeli truck hit oncoming vehicles at the Erez border crossing, killing four Palestinian workers

► A Palestinian Authority with limited self-rule powers was formed in 1994 after interim peace deals with Israel

► In the second uprising, Palestinian militants have staged thousands of shooting, bombing, rocket and mortar attacks on settlers and soldiers in Gaza since 2000. There were frequent attempts to infiltrate settlements or breach the border fence

► In response, Israel's Army carried out many raids and airstrikes against militants that also killed civilian bystanders in crowded urban areas. Thousands of Gazans were made homeless or lost livelihoods by Israeli demolitions of housing and flattening of farmland. Israel said such moves aimed to root out militants; Palestinians called it collective punishment

► A February 2005 ceasefire deal at an Israeli-Palestinian summit significantly reduced but has not ended violence in Gaza. —Reuters

Israeli forces, protesters clash in Gaza Strip

Reuters
Neve Dekalim (Gaza), August 18

ISRAELI SECURITY forces poured into the largest Gaza settlement on Tuesday, clashing with protesters defying orders for Jews to leave the occupied territory by midnight or be forcibly evicted. Soldiers and police trying to take control of Neve Dekalim, a flashpoint of resistance against Israel's first uprooting of settlements on land Palestinians want for a state, dragged away more than 50 youths, some kicking, punching and cursing.

The scuffles, the most violent since the army issued a 48-hour eviction notice to Gaza settlers, were wreathed in smoke as hundreds of demonstrators trying to block moving vans entering the enclave burned piles of rubbish on the main street.

"Where is the Jewish heart?" one youngster cried as four soldiers carried him away, each grabbing a limb.

Protesters pelted troops with eggs, stones and paint-filled balloons. One settler woman lay down sobbing in front of a



AP



AP

Armed police officers at Rafah refugee camp hold flowers given out by Palestinians celebrating the evacuation of the neighbouring Morag settlement (above) and two Jewish girls share a comforting moment at Morag on Tuesday.

hicle loaded with family belongings to leave Gaza's largest Jewish settlement bloc forever.

But signs of defiance remained in Gaza enclaves, where headline settlers vowed to stay put on land they believe was bequeathed to the Jewish people by God. Security officials fear that a hard core of ultranationalists, including some of the 5,000 who had infiltrated the settlements in recent weeks, could turn violent.

The Neve Dekalim melee began after soldiers used a saw to cut through the main gate early on Tuesday, and hundreds of troops streamed in to push back protesters. Youths arrested in the demonstration, all non-residents, became the first to be expelled from Gaza settlements since the pullout began, though most were released back into Israel. Elsewhere in Gaza settlements, people set fire to tires and several cars, and a house was torched.

In a televised address on Monday, Sharon told Gaza's 8,500 settlers he shared their pain but also understood the plight of 1.4 million Palestinians.

many settlers packed up trucks and shipping containers and joined an exodus that Israel says will mark the end of its 38-year occupation of the Gaza Strip.

"All of Gush Katif is in mourning," settler Gilad Meimon said as he waited in a ve-

one left after midnight can be removed by force.

"We do not intend to blink," said Brig.-Gen. Miri Regev, chief military spokeswoman. "If there is no choice, the police will arrest all of the lawbreakers."

Taking heed of the warning, conflict with Palestinians. Any-

bulldozer. A few people were left with bloodied faces.

Officials vowed to do whatever was necessary to clear the way for settlers leaving under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan for "disengaging" from

conflict with Palestinians. Any-

Failure to meet deadline has Iraqis worried

Reuters
Baghdad, August 16

SOME IRAQIS expressed fear on Tuesday that extending talks over a new constitution could cause more problems than it solves, while lawmakers put a brave face on their failure to draft the document by Monday's deadline.

The US administration, which pressed hard for the charter to be completed by August 15, also looked to play down the failure, with President George W. Bush and secretary of state Condoleezza Rice praising the effort, if not the result.

Violence, which has dogged the country for more than two years and which some hope will be tempered by the writing of an inclusive constitution, persisted. A mortar round landed near Baghdad's protected Green Zone as politicians met on Monday.

After weeks of talks, politicians conceded defeat just minutes before the midnight deadline, admitting they could not agree on the wording of the draft charter. To avoid having to dissolve parliament as a result, the National Assembly voted to change the

CONSTITUTION CRISIS

interim constitution and allow a week longer to come up with the new document, which must now be submitted to parliament by midnight on August 22.

"Come on, this is a success," planning minister Barham Salih, a senior Kurdish politician, said as he tried to look positively on the failure to meet the self-imposed deadline. "We are not killing each other," he said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari urged lawmakers to reach an agreement in the next week. Iraqis were skeptical about their politicians' performance, and worried at the prospect of further delays.

"The delay is not in the interests of the Iraqi people and the longer the process is drawn out, definitely the more harm it will do," said Ihsan Ali, a Baghdad resident sitting reading newspaper reports of the delay.

"We want this issue to end as soon as possible for the benefit of the Iraqi people."

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119-15 12878 K. Abu (D) Hamas refuses to disarm after Gaza pullout

Will defend homeland as long as one inch of Palestine remains occupied

GAZA CITY: Hamas will not surrender its weapons to the Palestinian Authority in the Gaza Strip after Israel's pullout from the territory, one of the Islamist movement's top leaders said on Friday.

"This army," Mahmud Zahar told reporters, after attending a training session of Hamas's military wing, the Ezzedin al-Qasam Brigades.

During a keynote speech to the Palestinian Parliament earlier this week, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas urged all militants to end their rocket attacks on Israeli targets as part of a larger appeal for calm during the pullout.

"It is criminal to claim that there is only one weapon," Mr. Zahar said, in reference to declarations by Mr. Abbas insisting that the Palestinian Authority was the only legitimate security tool.

Mr. Abbas met Mr. Zahar and Hamas's two other top Gaza leaders on Tuesday in a bid to ensure the group's militants would not seek to scupper the

historic pullout of Israeli troops and settlers.

Hamas, the group behind the majority of anti-Israeli attacks during the five-year uprising or *Intifada*, claims the rocket attacks were instrumental in persuading Israel to leave Gaza.

Greenhouses sold

A private economic foundation bought most of the greenhouses in the Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip for \$14 million, and will hand them to the Palestinians after Israel's pullout from Gaza, a negotiator said on Friday.

The greenhouses were bought by the Economic Cooperation Foundation, headed by the former Israeli peace negotiator, Yossi Beilin. Mr. Beilin, head of the dovish Yahad Party, said the money came from donations, including \$500,000 from U.S. mediator James Wolfensohn, who has been shuttling between the Israeli and Palestinian governments to ensure Gaza's economic recovery after the pullout. — AFP, AP



PULLING UP SHARON: A protester waves an anti-disengagement flag during a rally against the Israeli Government's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank in Tel Aviv late on Thursday. — PHOTO: AP

Boost to Turkey's EU bid

The European Commission's announcement of a draft framework for talks on Turkey's accession to the European Union (EU) is a welcome boost to the country's decades-long bid — as an associate member from 1963 and an official candidate from 1999. The development also bodes well for the continent's long-term stability, especially in the context of the recent setbacks to progress for political integration. Entry negotiations, to be held with the EU council of ministers and heads of state and government have committed themselves, are scheduled to start in October subject to unanimous endorsement of the draft framework by the 25 member-states. But the likely victory of Germany's Christian Democrats winning the federal election and general opposition to enlargement on the far right in France and Austria means Turkey's predominantly Muslim population will remain a potent issue during the lengthy negotiations. France and Austria have even promised their peoples that they will hold a referendum on Turkey's EU bid. Ironically, Turkey is the only candidate among Muslim countries for membership bringing its long record of developing a secular, modern, liberalist ethos as well as its partnership with the West — as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Central Treaty Organisation. The country's strategic importance for the EU in building bridges with the East and West Asia can hardly be overstated in today's global political scenario — a point underscored by the advocacy of Turkey's admission including the United Kingdom, which currently holds the EU Council presidency. The terms of Turkey's admission, the most stringent thus far in European enlargement, include a consensus among member-states on each of the 35 policy areas for deliberation and the right to suspend talks if one-third of the states in the Commission propose such a motion. Negotiations, which will continue until 2014, are open-ended. They signal the possibility of a privileged partnership, rather than full membership, although no applicant so far has failed to enter. Turkey's record on democratic rule and respect for human rights came under a cloud following its ugly military intervention with Greece over Cyprus and its 1974 military intervention in the creation of an independent state. To the credit of its leadership, the country has embarked on a programme of radical political reforms and abolished the death penalty in line with the basic tenets of the EU. Turkey has also — in fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria towards becoming a market economy — extended to the Republic of Cyprus, a new EU member state recognised by Turkey itself, the Ankara Customs Union agreement with the EU. Given the unresolved issues, "a civil dialogue" due to begin in the EU in 2006 on enlargement generally and on Turkey's accession in particular will test the legitimacy of future exercises towards greater stability in Europe.

Egypt must tolerate open debate

Political Islam must be given the air to breathe. Open debate can tackle the dangers of fundamentalism.

Jonathan Steele

SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY happened in Cairo the other day. The Muslim Brotherhood, which is an illegal organisation, joined Left-wing activists for a demonstration against President Hosni Mubarak. About a thousand protesters marched outside the Lawyers' Association's building, shouting slogans for freedom and an end to torture.

The strange thing was not that demonstrators dared to take to the streets. Over the last year anti-government protests have become increasingly frequent. Some were met with police beatings and arrests, but the more common pattern in recent weeks is a kind of cold peace.

The two protests I observed last week were typical. The demonstrators do not seek official permission, but the police know anyway through eavesdropping on mobile phones. Hours before the start hundreds of black-uniformed riot police with batons converge on the venue, while ordinary police go into blocks of flats and cafes to warn people not to join in. When the protesters arrive they are corralled into a small space by three lines of riot police to prevent them starting a march. The authorities are terrified that a mass rally could develop.

Unusual combination

The unusual feature of the combined left-wing and Muslim Brotherhood protest was that groups that could hardly be more different in their ideologies felt it useful to come together – “The first time this has happened since 1954 when Nasser clamped down on the Islamists and the left,” one excited participant whispered.

It would be wrong to pretend there was unity. The leftwingers got upset when the Brotherhood, most of them students, brandished small Qurans in their right hands, punching the air with the holy book. This violated the organisers' agreement. But the protest was an important sign of the increasing boldness of the Government's critics and their search for common ground in pressing for reform.

Nominations opened on Friday for the first contested election for the presidency since Mr. Mubarak took over in 1981. He controls state TV's coverage of the campaign and his party enjoys huge powers of patronage, so his rule is hardly threatened. The bombs in Sharm el-Sheikh last weekend were a blow to Mr. Mubarak's international prestige, and his officials assume they were more likely the work of an extreme Egyptian group, perhaps working with the Bedouin of the Sinai, rather than Al-Qaeda. But they may give him a temporary boost in the public at large.

Egypt's Opposition forces are setting their sights on parliamentary elections in November, in which they could do very well. They want an end to the state of emergency,



NEW BOLDNESS: An anti-government demonstration in Cairo. – PHOTO: AP

in force for two decades, and a restoration of civil liberties. The Muslim Brotherhood, which renounced violence a generation ago, desperately wants to be legalised, even though its image of being victimised adds to its appeal.

In short, the country, which still claims to be the leader of the Arab world, is going through unprecedented turbulence. Yet the West hardly seems to have noticed. The United States and European governments put their hope in a gradual reform of the Mubarak regime, if not thanks to him, then to his ambitious son, Gamal. “They want reforms that are more than cosmetic but less than profound,” says Emad Eldin Shahin, a leading analyst.

Islamists' role

The big issue in Egypt is what role the Islamists are really playing. Mr. Mubarak's old arguments that stability is more important than democracy, and only he stands in the way of fundamentalism, are wearing thin. The economy cannot find jobs for millions of school – and university-leavers, and pressures from the international financial

institutions to end subsidies on cheap food and fuel could lead to a social explosion (as happened in Yemen last week). In this climate the attractions of political Islam are growing.

It is not just the Muslim Brotherhood. Ultra-puritanical Salafis, financed largely by Saudi Arabia, are the new force gaining ground on Egypt's campuses, as well as in smaller towns and marginal communities in Cairo. Although the government licenses all imams, the Salafis use the fact that their message is ostensibly only about social values to spread their radical views in the mosques.

The more moderate Muslim Brotherhood, whose leadership comes from the urban middle class and owners of small businesses, has an ambiguous line. Many of Egypt's secular intelligentsia feel it plays along with the regime, and may in the end not support an Opposition candidate or call for a boycott of the presidential election. Its primary aim of being legalised makes it open to compromise, they say. Is the Brotherhood an Egyptian version of Turkey's moderate Islamists, who swept to power in 2002? Its

economic policies – support for privatisation and gradually opening Egypt to global free trade – are part of the orthodoxy of modernisation.

“They've realised the importance of moving from being an Islamic movement and becoming a civic movement of mainstream nationalism with Islamic principles,” says Mr. Shahin.

The political context differs from Turkey's, according to Kamal Abbas, one of the new breed of independent trade-union leaders. “Turkey is a secular state with a mature civil society that has evolved through various stages,” he says. “Egypt has never had democracy. For now the Brotherhood stands for civil rights, but its basic stance is against them. It has one language for the media and another for its followers.”

And, on the flanks, the Salafis are gathering strength. But the answer to both trends is to let political Islam have the air to breathe. Only through legalisation, debate, openness and public competition can the dangers of fundamentalism be properly met. Repression always backfires. – ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

30 JUL 2005

THE NEW

From conflict to politics

As Hamas and Hizbullah find success at the ballot box, calls are heard for them to disarm.

Alastair Crooke

110-11
29/7

IN THE wake of the London bombings it is difficult to deal with issues of political violence; nonetheless, these need to be addressed from a perspective of critical thinking. This is nowhere more pertinent than in the Middle East, where this week I have been taking part in meetings to bring Americans and Europeans together to promote engagement with Hizbullah and Hamas.

It is axiomatic: as armed movements, such as Hamas and Hizbullah, find success at the ballot box, strident calls are heard for them to put aside their guns. "You can't have it both ways," the West argues. "You can't be both democratic and violent." For a few, these demands are intended to speed the transition of these groups into conventional politics, even if privately those making the calls may be sceptical that their message will be heeded. But for most, the call is based on a misunderstanding of the psychology of groups engaged in conflict. Yet history shows that more peace processes have been destroyed by premature attempts at disarmament than from any other cause.

On the face of it, the demand for those at the ballot to give up violence seems legitimate. For those of us living in stable societies it appears self-evident that politics and guns do not mix. We simply cannot understand why such groups, say in the disordered context of Palestine or Lebanon, fail to see why it is self-evidently in their best interest to give up violence. It often seems to us that owing to some mysterious personal defects, they somehow cannot seem to perceive their own self-interest correctly.

To those inside such societies, however, the reason is clear. Conflict and the experience of trauma and humiliation generate intense feelings that can be overwhelming. Here we could usefully differentiate between psychological and strategic motives.

Traumatised community

During the last Palestinian *intifada* it was possible to see an entire community presenting the symptoms of trauma: an inability to sleep, deep depression, lack of motivation, and loss of appetite. Psychologists tell us that humiliation and trauma typically generate feelings of violence that endure for years even among those living in stable societies.

Most of us have little experience of armed conflict, and so we do not appreciate how hard it is to make transitions under the bitter weight of anger and irreparable personal loss. If we wish to obtain our political goals we should factor this in.

Transitions from conflict to politics never occur in a moment. They take time. They require broad-based community support and a commitment to inclusiveness. Without a process that is inclusive, it is difficult for any communi-

ty to overcome the feelings of anger that persist beyond any formal resolution of a conflict. Psychology also suggests that movements that see themselves as underdogs, as pursuing a just cause against overwhelming odds, are often trapped in a victim psychology – and so look to the stronger party for a gesture that will change the direction of events. This perception of victimhood leads to a deep mistrust, which makes it nearly impossible for them to disarm immediately, as it increases their sense of insecurity and thus the possibility of increased violence.

At a strategic level, this perception of the "asymmetry of power" – the conclusion of armed groups that disarmament is surrender – has its impact on the political processes. In this calculation, retention of arms is the one way of ensuring that, once a political process begins, it will be fair, because both sides will respect the other's strength. This search for mutual respect underlies the Islamist approach to negotiations. Islamists do not believe that a durable or just solution can emerge from negotiation unless both sides bestow at least grudging respect on their adversary.

While largely secular movements such as the Palestinian Fatah tend to look for international support to right their asymmetric imbalance with Israel, Islamists insist that political independence is necessary if a durable solution is to be achieved.

Hizbullah provides one such model. Its resistance to Israel has gained it the grudging respect of the Israeli political establishment, thereby allowing it to successfully negotiate prisoner releases with the Sharon Government.

Our rhetoric, of "they can't have it both ways" should be taken with a pinch of salt. History is replete with examples of negotiations that take place in parallel with continued resistance. The U.S. negotiated with the Vietnamese in Paris without the need for a ceasefire. Likewise, U.S. authorities are now engaging with the Sunni resistance in Iraq to persuade it to join a political process – though no voices are raised in Europe or America demanding its disarmament as a pre-condition of such talks.

Demilitarisation of a conflict cannot be ignored of course. We should, however, be cautious of allowing our desire to see this happen speedily become hostage to those who may use it to construct preconditions to engagement.

What is important at the outset is not disarmament. The removal of weapons as a threat to others should be the first priority. Gradually this may lead to disarmament, but only as confidence and trust in a political process grows. This takes time. — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2005

(Alastair Crooke is a director of Conflicts Forum, a U.K.- and U.S.- based non-profit organisation working for dialogue with Islamists.)

Blasts in Egyptian resort kill 88

HD-1

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W. Amia (W) L

Al-Qaeda-linked group claims responsibility

SHARM EL-SHEIKH (EGYPT): At least 88 people were killed in a string of bomb attacks that rocked this tourist-packed Red Sea resort early on Saturday. Nine foreigners were among the victims.

At least three consecutive explosions went off shortly after 1 a.m. One of them destroyed the Ghazala Garden hotel on the resort's main stretch, another detonated in a car park and a third bomb ripped through the town's Old Market.

The death toll could rise, rescue workers said. The lobby of the 176-room hotel in Naama Bay collapsed into a pile of concrete.

Several hours after the attacks, a group citing ties to the Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the explosions on an Islamic website. The Abdullah Azzam Brigades, Al-Qaeda, in Syria and

Egypt, was one of two extremist groups that also claimed responsibility for the October bombings at the Egyptian resorts of Taba and Ras Shitan that killed 34. It claimed responsibility for a Cairo bombing in late April as well.

The authenticity of the statement could not be verified. But a top Egyptian official said there were some indications the latest bombings were linked to the Taba explosions.

"We have some clues, especially about the car that was exploded in the Old Market," said Interior Minister Habib al-Adli.

The United States, Israel and European and West Asian countries condemned the attacks, and neighbouring Jordan said it was immediately tightening security at its tourist sites.

Sharm el-Sheik has expanded

at a furious pace in recent years, making it a major player in Egypt's vital tourism industry, drawing Europeans, Israelis and Arabs from oil-producing Gulf nations.

The town has been host to multiple summits for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The attacks in Taba ended a long halt in Egyptian militant violence.

The last major attack was in 1997, when Islamic militants killed 58 foreign tourists and four Egyptians at the Pharaonic Temple of Hatshepsut outside Luxor in southern Egypt.

There were signs that the bombings were by suicide attackers. — AFP, AP

Details on Page 12

Pro-Fatah militants threaten Hamas

Associated Press

GAZA, July 19.—
Palestinian militants linked to the ruling Fatah movement today put their gunmen on high alert and threatened to retaliate in kind if attacked by the rival Hamas group, signaling a rise in tensions.

The threat came hours after a violent clash between militants from the Hamas and Palestinian security officials in which two offices, housing Hamas-affiliated research companies were burned down.

Six people were wounded in the shoot-out.

"We have declared a state of emergency and we are taking the utmost precautions. Our members were warned to prepare to face any attack against us or against Palestinian security forces," said a spokesman for the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades here.

7 9 JUL 2006 THE STATESMAN

Withdrawal symptoms

IF THE sporadic violence in and around the Gaza Strip escalates any further, it could stretch the fragile four-month truce between the Palestinians and Israelis too thin. And that is the last thing anyone wants, considering there's less than a month to go before Israel starts its unilateral withdrawal from Gaza. Last week, four Palestinians were killed when Israeli forces fired helicopter-borne missiles at suspected militant hideouts in Gaza, after an Israeli woman was killed in a rocket assault.

Earlier, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ordered his forces to shatter a militant group, after a suicide bomber blew himself up in the town of Netanya, killing four Israelis. If Israel's resumption of targeted killings of Palestinian militants is disturbing, so too are the internecine battles in the Palestinian ranks as forces loyal to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas crack down on the militants. Ever since Mr Sharon announced his Gaza withdrawal in January 2004, his strongest card has been

public opinion as a majority of Israelis favour the move. But the number of recent attacks by Palestinian militant groups on Gaza settlements and towns close to the Gaza boundary could change that, as people wonder whether leaving Gaza will make them any safer.

The Israeli premier has a delicate balancing act to do as he faces strong opposition from his chief political opponent, Binyamin Netanyahu, who has announced that he would vote against the plan when it comes up for final approval. Even the outgoing chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Moshe Yaalon, has publicly voiced his concern at the withdrawal from Gaza. But having reached the point of no return in the pullback plan, Mr Sharon may as well now push ahead with it. For the general opinion that the disengagement will have only limited impact on the peace process misses an important point: that a successful pullback would reduce deaths in the conflict, which in turn could increase trust between the two sides.

18 JUL 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Sharon gives his army free hand

Hamas militant shot

Israel, threatening a major ground offensive into Gaza, gave a free hand to security forces to stop Palestinian cross-border rocket salvos on Sunday. Troops and tanks massed in preparation for an attack, but Israeli political sources said they were unlikely to move before US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice visits to try to salvage a crumbling 5-month-old cease-fire.

The worst surge in bloodshed since the truce was agreed has threatened to hamper Israel's withdrawal from Jewish settlements in occupied Gaza, starting next month, and amplified doubts over prospects for peacemaking.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he had instructed the army "to act without limitation to stop the strikes on Israeli communities" after rocket and mortar salvos continued despite an appeal by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

In the southern Gaza Strip, Saeed Seyam, a commander of the Hamas group that is behind much of the rocket fire, was killed with a single bullet fired from a nearby settlement.

His father said he had been going to water the garden. The army said it had killed him as part of a revived assassination policy. "Hamas will not stand handcuffed against the new crime," said spokesman Mushir Al-Masri.

Troops also said they killed a gunman nearing a settlement in central Gaza. There was no Palestinian confirmation.

In northern Gaza, an Israeli aircraft fired missiles at a car carrying three Hamas militants leaving a site in Beit Lahiya used to fire rockets at Jewish settlements, witnesses said. The militants jumped out but one was wounded by shrapnel, witnesses and medics said. The Israeli army had no comment.

Palestinian mortars injured six Israelis in southern Gaza settlements. Hamas said it had fired them in retaliation for the killing of Seyam, its ninth loss in the latest upsurge. Soon after, witnesses said two Palestinians were injured by tank fire.

Troops, tanks and armoured vehicles have massed ready for an offensive into the Gaza Strip, and discussion of when it could begin dominated Sharon's cabinet meeting. But political sources said Israel was likely to give Abbas more time to bring Palestinian attacks to a halt. "There are signs that the situation could be defused," said one.

Egyptian officials met Hamas leaders in Gaza to try to shore up the truce. Rice is due in the region at the end of the week. Washington wants to preserve the cease-fire and supports Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, seeing it as a possible springboard to renewed talks on its "road map" peace plan.

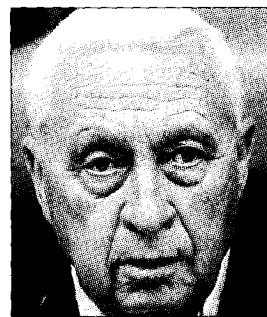
Israel has not launched a large-scale offensive into the Gaza Strip since the death of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat last year raised new hopes for West Asian peacemaking.

Abbas wants to avert an Israeli incursion into Gaza but has to tread carefully against Hamas. Gun battles on Friday between Hamas, committed to destroying Israel, and Palestinian police trying to stop the rocket fire have raised fears of civil war.

Senior Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said an Israeli ground incursion into Gaza "would have only disastrous results on the prospects for the Gaza disengagement and on the peace process as a whole."

Sharon, who ordered the army to step up action against militants after a suicide bombing and rocket attack killed six Israelis last week, has vowed not to quit Gaza under fire.

Reuters, Gaza



*...act without
limitation to
stop the strikes
on Israeli
communities*

Turkey bomb blast kills 5

M. A. ...
Turkey

Associated Press

ANKARA, July 16. — A bomb blast tore apart a minibus in the coastal city of Kusadasi as it carried people to a beach in a popular Aegean resort, killing five persons including a British and an Irish tourist, officials said.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility but the explosion was the second of its kind to target a Turkish tourist resort in a week, sparking fears that militants are trying to undermine Turkey's lucrative tourism sector, which had expected to welcome more than 20 million visitors this year.

The blast in the coastal city of Kusadasi, a favourite with British, Irish and German tourists, reduced the bus to a scorched, twisted heap of metal. Thirteen persons were injured in the attack, including five Britons.

Live footage showed a man's charred body draped over the twisted remains of a seat and an injured woman lying on the road, just a few metres from the beach. Civilians rushed to the bus after the attack and carried the injured away from the burning wreckage.

Police quickly boosted security in the town,

searching cars at the entrance to Kusadasi. Sniffer dogs patrolled the town's centre.

Early police reports had said that a female suicide bomber had carried out the attack. Police officers said those reports were issued after investigators discovered that the torso of a woman on the bus was completely torn apart, leading them to speculate that she had been carrying the bomb.

Deputy governor of Aydin province Nurdogan Kaya said later that the blast was caused by explosives planted on the minibus.

Later today police said that more evidence was pointing towards a bombing than a suicide attack, Kusadasi Governor Ali Baris said.

Kurdish rebels have carried out bombings in Aegean resort towns but a top Kurdish rebel commander, Zübeyir Aydar, condemned the attack in a statement to the Germany-based Mezopotamya News Agency, which often carries rebel statements.

Leftist and Islamic militants are also active in the country.

Speaking shortly after the explosion, Prime Minister Mr Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey was taking anti-

terror measures, but added that "it is not possible to stop it 100 per cent, no matter how strict the security measures you take are."

Last Sunday, a bomb hidden in a soda can wounded 21 people, including three foreign tourists, in the resort town Cesme, north of Kusadasi. On April 30, a bomb in a cassette player killed a police officer and wounded four others in Kusadasi.

The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons Organisation or TAK claimed responsibility for both bombings, warning that it would be keep up attacks against tourist areas.

The Falcons are believed to be hard-liners linked to the PKK. It is not clear how closely they coordinate with the PKK leadership, which is based in the mountains of northern Iraq.

The attack caused alarm in Turkey. "This incident at the height of the tourism season has saddened us," the Anatolia news agency quoted Kaya as saying.

Angry shop owners tried to block prevent some television news crews from filming the scene of the attack, apparently afraid that the images would discourage tourists.



An injured woman being carried away from the blast site in Kusadasi on Saturday. AFP

BLOODLINES

Suicide bomber kills 54 in Baghdad

BAGHDAD, July 16. — A suicide bomber detonated explosives strapped to his body at a gas station near a Shiite mosque south of Baghdad today, triggering a huge explosion in a fuel tanker and killing at least 54 persons and injuring 82, police said. Police Captain Muthanna Khaled Ali said the attack took place in Musayyib, about 60 km south of Baghdad. Ambulances were taking victims to hospitals, he added. According to witnesses and police, the fuel tanker was moving slowly toward the

pumps when an attacker ran to it and detonated his charge. The station is located at the centre of the town near a cluster of houses, many of which caught fire, witnesses said. Gasoline stations in Iraq routinely include a number of small businesses selling tea, soft drinks and snacks and are often crowded. Musayyib is a town, with both Shias and Sunnis in large numbers, along the Euphrates river in the "triangle of death" — a name given due to the large number of kidnappings and killings of Shiite Muslims. AP

... hours a victim of the explosion

Beirut bomb targets deputy PM

Agencies
Beirut, July 12

Handwritten: XG-13, 1397

A POWERFUL explosion — heard miles away — tore through a Christian neighbourhood in northern Beirut, killing at least two people and wounding 12 others, including Lebanon's outgoing deputy Prime Minister Elias Murr. According to a general with the Lebanese Army, Murr's injuries are not life-threatening and were suffered when a car bomb detonated as his convoy passed. Murr is also the country's acting defence minister and is a former interior minister. The blast shattered the windows of villas located hundreds of feet away and ripped a heavy iron gate from its hinges.

Murr is seen as strongly pro-Syrian. He is the son-in-law of President

ETA sets off explosions at power plant

EXPLOSIONS NEAR a power station in Spain's northern Basque country on Tuesday followed a call to a newspaper by Basque separatist guerrillas, ETA, that warned of four bombs, the police said. The four small blasts caused no injuries and the plant at

Amorebieta was not damaged, Basque officials said.

The police had cleared the area after the warning, which came about half an hour before the explosions, evacuating more than 100 staff from the plant.

Emile Lahoud, Damascus' staunchest ally in Lebanon. But Murr's father has struck an alliance with Michel Aoun, a Christian former general who recently returned from exile after 14 years. "Murr had access to information about movements and terrorist organisations in the country and he was definitely exposed to such an attack," Aoun was quoted by Reuters as

telling al-Manar television.

"This will not affect the formation of the government and could even be a positive factor to end the political volatility we are living through."

Lebanon has seen a string of bombings that killed or wounded leading anti-Syrian figures — starting with the February 14 assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Egypt envoy to Iraq kidnapped

Baghdad, July 3 (Reuters): Egypt's envoy to Iraq has been kidnapped in Baghdad, possibly in response to reports he was to become the first full-ranking Arab ambassador to the US-backed Iraqi government, diplomats and police sources said today.

Ihab el-Sherif, the head of mission, was cornered by gunmen in cars while on a short trip to buy a newspaper near his home last evening and had not been heard from since, a diplomat said.

"The motives are believed to be political," he said, noting that Iraq's foreign minister had said just last week that Egypt would become the first Arab state to appoint a full-ranking ambassador to Baghdad since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

The Egyptian foreign ministry, which said it was "checking reports" Sherif had "disappeared", has yet to confirm it plans to upgrade his post. The Baghdad mission had no comment.

Iraqi police sources said they had found the envoy's white four-wheel drive car undamaged not far from his home.

An upgrade to full ambassadorial status for Sherif on the part of Egypt, the most populous and traditionally most powerful Arab state, could enhance the standing of a new Iraqi government many Arabs view with suspicion because of its backing from the US and sectarian ties to Shia Iran.

"He was buying a newspaper on Saturday evening when two BMWs full of gunmen blocked his way and kidnapped him," the diplomat said, adding there had been no word from the kidnappers.

It appeared the envoy had



Ihab el-Sherif

been on his own, he said.

More than 200 foreigners and thousands of Iraqis have been kidnapped in the chaos that followed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Some have been killed. Many have been released after the payment of ransoms to criminal gangs.

Others have been taken by insurgents from Iraq's Sunni Arab community — a minority in Iraq but the majority in most other Arab states — who have made political demands.

A senior Egyptian diplomat was kidnapped in the Iraqi capital Baghdad and released unharmed after several days. Those kidnappers released a statement condemning an Egyptian offer of assistance to the US-installed Iraqi government. Full details of the incident, however, were never made public.

The kidnapping of the envoy was an uncomfortable reminder of insecurity in Iraq as the new, Shia-led government strives to encourage foreign investment following a tour abroad last month by Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari and other ministers.

Hamas silent on invite to Cabinet

LAURA KING
JERUSALEM | JULY 2

PALESTINIAN Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has made overtures to the Islamic militant group Hamas about joining his Cabinet in the near future, Palestinian officials said on Friday.

Hamas has not yet said whether it is willing to accept such an invitation. However, the group in recent months has made clear its interest in mainstream electoral politics and intends to field candidates in parliamentary balloting later this year.

The idea of approaching Hamas to participate in the government has been raised in several recent sessions of Abbas' Fatah faction, Palestinian officials said. Fatah's Central Committee, which sets the movement's policy, is meeting in the Jordanian capital to accommodate exiled leaders such as Farouk Kaddoumi, a Palestine Liberation Organisation hardliner who refuses to enter the Palestinian territories because he would have to submit to Israeli border formalities. Fatah officials also are reportedly weighing candidates, including Kaddoumi, for the position of deputy to Abbas.

Hamas, which scored strongly in municipal elections held over the past several months in the West Bank and Gaza, is expected to win an easy third of the seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Both Hamas and Fatah officials in the Gaza Strip said that Hamas might be willing to accept a Cabinet position or positions in advance of the pullout in



Militants of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades at a government building in the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza

Fatah gunmen storm govt offices for jobs

GAZA: Dozens of militants linked to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah group raided a government building in Gaza on Saturday, demanding he make good on a deal to recruit them into his security forces. Abbas's government agreed last month to give hundreds of gunmen from the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade jobs in its security forces in a bid to keep them off the streets.

In the latest in the months of growing lawlessness in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, about 40 armed militants from the group occupied Rafah's Legislative Council building for around four hours. Group spokesman Abu Wael said they had not used violence or held anyone hostage. The al-Aqsa gunmen relayed their message to the Palestinian Authority through a local lawmaker, Abed-Rabbo Abu Awn, who said they "have raised a legitimate demand". The Palestinian Interior Ministry declined immediate comment. —Reuters

order to help ensure that the handover of Gaza, where the group has great influence, goes smoothly.

Israel and the Palestinian Authority have been locked for months in a dispute about how Abbas ought to deal with Hamas. The group's militant wing carried out dozens of suicide bombings during more than four years of fighting, and it has never abandoned an ideology that calls for the destruction of Israel.

Up until now, Hamas has

declined to take part in the Palestinian government, citing objections in principle to the interim peace accords that brought the Palestinian Authority into being more than a decade ago.

Hamas, together with Palestinian armed factions, agreed in March to observe a period of calm until the end of the year, refraining from attacks against Israelis. However, its militants have violated that informal accord by firing mortars at Jewish settlements. —LAT-WP

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NDIAN EXPRESS