

# Half of Israelis would Give Land for Peace

by Benjamin Cohen

WHILE the government stands firmly against the idea, a new opinion poll suggests that 48 per cent of Israeli people are prepared to give up territory in exchange for lasting peace.

Many Israelis are realising that the Palestinians can no longer be regarded simply as a "security problem" and are taking action to help the situation. In Jerusalem, an Israeli and a Palestinian have joined together to see what can be done.

The Israel-Palestine Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI) was set up in Jerusalem by American-born Israeli Gershon Baskin and Palestinian Ghassan Abdullah.

Its work is based on the principle that both Jews and Arabs have the right to self-determination. Its research is done by joint teams of Palestinians and Israelis.

Baskin recognises that the Gulf War has made it more difficult for the two groups to cooperate. At the same time it has made the need for a settlement more apparent. The group believes any settlement must involve territorial compromise.

Baskin also believes the only way the United States can get peace talks moving is to get down to the real issues, as US Secretary of State James Baker is now doing, to stop Israel avoiding talks.

Until now the US's problems in the US in trying to convene a Middle East peace conference have been blamed on procedural difficulties. But last week, US Secretary of State James Baker acknowledged that an Israeli settlement policy in the West Bank was the principle obstacle to negotiations in the Middle East. At last, world attention seems to be focused on the goals of a peace conference rather than the problems of setting it up.

In this round of confrontation with his Arab neighbours Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir is using the large number of immigrants as a reason to hang on to the disputed territories.

Thousands of Soviet Jewish immigrants are arriving in Israel each month. In the space of 22 hours, 15,000 Jews arrived from Ethiopia.

Shamir stands firmly against any proposals to give up territory for peace, despite

**Israel steadfastly refuses to give up any land in exchange for peace. Yet a new opinion poll shows nearly half of Israelis do not mind the idea. An Israeli and a Palestinian have set up an independent group to seek solutions to Israel's problems. They, along with Washington which is trying to set up peace talks, know the Israel-Arab problem can no longer be avoided.**



the large portion of the population that disagrees with him. In the past, Israeli protest movements have had no effect on government policy. Some are placing hope in the newly founded IPCRI.

IPCRI researchers have selected controversial issues for their work. They are examining the possibility of linking the West Bank and Gaza Strip, allowing Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, and dealing with the claims of Israeli settlers in the occupied territories. They are also looking at the future of Jerusalem and the problem of water distribution.

Water is a particularly acute problem. By next year, the group's founders warn, the shallow aquifer in the Gaza Strip will not be able to meet the irrigation demands of Palestinian farmers.

In addition, the uncon-

trolled use of nitrogen fertilisers has polluted the aquifer and the sewage system. Serious kidney disease is likely to emerge as a result.

Experts from Israel and Palestine believe it would require only one per cent of the Nile to solve the water crisis in the Gaza strip.

Egypt has repeatedly refused any water exchange with Israel. The IPCRI believes it would change its position if it were dealing with the Palestinians directly. Under Israeli occupation that is impossible.

Baskin hopes initiatives like the formation of his group will force the Israeli government to acknowledge that there are

other problems in the region besides military security, and that the solution lies in cooperation not confrontation.

Baskin must still convince policy makers his group's research is important for politicians to understand.

The IPCRI is studying ideas such as the possibility of a separate Palestinian bank and

infrastructure in the occupied territories, and mechanisms for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories.

The group has not ruled out a two-state solution, as the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) would favour.

Palestinians and Israelis have been fighting bloody battles over land both claim as their holy homeland since the end of World War Two. The United Nations designated the land as a permanent home for Jews as compensation for the cruel treatment they received in Europe during the war.

— GEMINI NEWS  
Benjamin Cohen is a British freelance journalist who specialises in writing on the Middle East.

## Teachings of Eid-ul-Azha

The Daily Star joins the nation in celebrating Eid-ul-Azha and wishes its patrons, readers and well wishers a very happy Eid. It is true that not all of us have the means to celebrate the Eid in a manner that we would like to. Perhaps many of us are unable to give to our children and to our beloved ones the things that would have made them happy. Yet, we are here and together, celebrating the special occasion that teaches us to sacrifice, to give, and to share. It is an event that forces us to re-examine our values and calls upon us to rise above our everyday goals.

The story that inspires the Muslims all over the world and one whose celebration the Eid-ul-Azha marks, is of a father sacrificing his own son in the name of Allah, one which is a permanent source of guidance and inspiration for us. But should we not ask ourselves how much of that spirit of sacrifice marks our celebration of the Eid today? Are we really purifying ourselves through the act of sacrifice? Does our 'qurbani' need to confine itself to sacrificing only a cow or another animal? Is our 'qurbani' really in the spirit and meaning that it is supposed to be?

There is no denying the fact that there has been a tremendous erosion of values in the conduct of our social life. While to talk about spiritual values, it is the more mundane ones that we run after. Small gestures of courtesy and kindness seem to be disappearing from our behaviour. Double standard marks every aspect of our public life. Mixing impurities in everyday consumer items appear to have become a legitimate method of enhancing traders' profit. Nothing could be further from the teachings of sacrifice, especially those dealing with Eid-ul-Azha. Yet we will celebrate it, utter pious words on the occasion and then go about doing our everyday business as if we have heard nothing, and learnt nothing.

The teachings of Eid-ul-Azha bears far reaching meaning for a society in our state of development. It is only through a spirit of sacrifice, sharing and doing things for others, that we can develop our country. An honest and caring nation is what we must become, and the teachings of Eid-ul-Azha can be our guiding light in this struggle.

## Death Sentence in Kuwait

Trial of people accused of collaboration with Iraqi occupation forces continues unabated in Kuwait. To date, 29 defendants, including six journalists, have been sentenced to death by martial law courts despite widespread expression of doubt and distaste about such harsh sentences. The trials themselves are running the risk of becoming little more than a continuation of the witch-hunt that began soon after Kuwait was liberated by US-led multinational forces. We may recall here that over 200 Palestinians were reportedly tortured to death in Kuwaiti police stations in the weeks following liberation. We joined the world then in condemning those atrocities, just as we are one with the international community today in condemning the ease with which death penalties and severe prison terms are being handed out for such offences as wearing a Saddam T-shirt.

The death sentences passed on six journalists who worked for a newspaper published by the Iraqi occupation authorities, are not only questionable, they are fraught with bad omens for the future. The journalists, like hundreds of others in various professions, worked because under occupation they were hardly in a position to choose. The Iraqis no doubt paid particular attention to newspapermen since the value of propaganda in a conflict was not lost on them. This put journalists living and working in occupied Kuwait in a highly sensitive position — accused of being collaborators if they continued to work, or threatened with arrests or worse if they didn't. But one thing is pretty clear, that they had to consider their personal safety and the safety of their families before taking any decision. Many people in Kuwait worked under extreme duress at the time, and journalists were no exception. Therefore working for Iraqi authorities itself can hardly be interpreted as an act of collaboration.

By passing death sentences on journalists, the Kuwaiti authorities have betrayed a sense of fear or contempt for the written word, which cannot be a welcome sign. The journalists were not accused of murder or taking part in torture. If their crime was to back the Iraqi occupation by writing in its favour, then it should have been regarded as a non-lethal crime, totally undeserving of a lethal punishment. There is even claim, made by international human rights groups, that many confessions were made under torture, which again brings into question the very validity of the trials themselves. Judging by the speed with which these cases are being disposed of, one is left with the feeling that something akin to summary trials is taking place. On top of it all, the lack of any right of appeal makes the whole proceedings totally incompatible with international standard of justice.

The Kuwaiti authorities should not forget it was the world community, under mandate from the United Nations, which made the liberation of their country possible in the first place. The world did not do so in order to replace Iraqi aggression with Kuwaiti tyranny, but to establish rule of law and a sense of justice in the region. By pursuing with these collaborator cases in this arbitrary manner, Kuwait is showing scant regard for the principles which led the world to make such enormous sacrifices. As the source of supreme authority in Kuwait, Emir Sheikh Jaber al-Ahmed al-Sabah, without whose approval no execution can take place, should intervene to put an end to this mockery of justice before any damage is done to Kuwait's image and inter-regional relations.

## Afghanistan

### Najibullah, the Survivor

ABUL: Afghan President Najibullah appreciates international efforts to restore peace in his war-ravaged land, but rejects the imposition of preconditions before free and direct elections can be held under United Nations supervision.

According to him, "greater common ground" between the two superpowers and heightened mediation efforts on all sides can result in an Afghan accord.

"It is only through elections that the Afghan people will have the choice to decide whom they want to select," Najibullah said in an interview with IPS.

"No person or force, inside or outside, has the right to make any prerequisites against the people's will," he added. Najibullah who became President in 1986 was obliquely referring to the Pakistan-based groups of Afghan rebels supported by the United States which are demanding that he voluntarily step down from office and clear the way for them.

In his executive office at the presidential secretariat here, the Afghan leader who three

## Afghanistan

### Najibullah, the Survivor

years ago had been written off by the West exuded confidence and left no doubt that he was in control of his country.

He has been described as the "great survivor" in a country where political fortunes fluctuated wildly till his takeover.

Najibullah continues in power at the head of the ruling Watan (Homeland) party despite armed opposition by rebel groups, withdrawal of direct military support in 1988 by the Soviet Union and a coup attempt last year by his former defence minister, Shah Nawaz Tanai.

Abandoning the unpopular measures of his Marxist predecessors, Najibullah has begun projecting an Islamic identity while negotiating a settlement of the Afghan civil war.

During the interview, the Afghan president stressed the United Nations had a leading

## Instability in India would have an adverse effect on Sri Lanka

### Harold Pieris writes from Colombo

THE killing of Rajiv Gandhi should drive home the message to the Indian and the Tamil Nadu governments and the whole Indian nation that they must curb the activities of the Sri Lanka Tigers.

The suspicion is that the Tigers, the militant Tamil group waging war in northeast Sri Lanka for a separate state, are responsible for the bombing.

Throughout the last decade the Tigers have operated freely and openly from their Tamil Nadu bases in southern India, raising a smokescreen of 'Tamil Genocide' in Sri Lanka.

They have had training camps in India's Madras state which the Indian government denied and turned a blind eye on. They had huge arsenals there and smuggled across to Northern Sri Lanka men, weapons and medicines required for their war.

The Tigers were responsible for the bomb blast which took place at Meenambakkam Airport in Madras which killed 30 people. They were responsible for a series of massive bomb blasts in north and east Sri Lanka and in Colombo. The most recent was the assassination of the minister of planta-

tions and state minister of defence, Ranjan Wijeratne, and 19 others, leaving 75 injured and causing extensive damage to buildings.

The Tigers never accepted responsibility for these acts. But they have proved over a decade that they had the technological capability to detonate these bombs.

The Tigers have denied any links with the Rajiv Gandhi assassination.

Analysts point out that they could have been hired by others to kill Mr. Gandhi or individual Tigers may have been lured by money to carry this out. In recent times, the Tigers have ruthlessly gunned down other Sri Lankan Tamil leaders in Madras.

As one analyst points out, "There is no getting away from the fact the Tigers have created conditions in Tamil Nadu for such an assassination to be successfully accomplished there. Significantly, Gandhi died not by a bullet but by an

explosive blast, an area that the Tigers specialise in."

The Tigers have been able to scuttle any peace talks because they enjoyed a safe haven in Tamil Nadu state. In recent months the New Delhi government has assured Sri Lanka that India respects Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity and would not

interfere in her internal affairs nor permit anyone to use her territory to destabilise Sri Lanka.

Rajiv Gandhi has had firsthand experience of the intransigence of the Tigers and was largely responsible in pressuring Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar to dismiss the administration of Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi who was actively supporting the Tigers. Mr Karunanidhi even asked the Tigers to bring their wounded cadres to Madras for medical treatment.

Now, the dangers of "riding the Tiger" have been driven in to the Indian people. And Sri Lanka expects India to deal

with this group. Only if they are militarily weakened, observers say, would the Tigers come to the negotiating table. This is the only way to reach a settlement on the ethnic issues in northeast Sri Lanka.

Events in India have always had a bearing on Sri Lanka. India attaining independence in 1947, paved the way for Sri Lanka to gain independence in 1948.

Illicit immigration to Sri Lanka and the problems of the Indian Tamil plantation workers in Sri Lanka were items on the Indo-Sri Lanka political agenda in the 1950s and 1960s. Now these have been settled. In the 1980s the Tamil issue has been dominant.

But now there is a better understanding between the two countries on this issue. Both are expected to work more closely on economic issues in this decade for which a joint commission has been set up.

Sri Lanka has been watching apprehensively the growing escalation of violence in India because instability in India would have an adverse effect on Sri Lanka.

— Depthnews Asia.

## To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### What is sacrifice?

Sir, We are all well aware of the extensive loss of life and property wrought by the century's worst cyclone recently. The overwhelming responses of the people from all walks of life to appeals of help-in whatever way they could-for the horror-stricken victims was indeed touching. The whole nation has felt the brunt of such a devastation.

However, there is a need to put in a word of caution: in view of enormous loss of animal lives as well, one should restrain oneself-at least this year-from sacrificing cattle and goats in the coming Eid. Bangladesh can ill-afford further loss of lives-be it animal or human. But cattle markets are already being set-up everywhere.

It is amazing how we turn such zealous when it comes to observing any religious ceremonies. Yet we are the same people who often forget to be humane-which is the most important tenet of religion. The money that may be spent in "slaughtering" animals this Eid can be utilized in rehabilitating

### Students, coloured water and public

Sir, I was going towards New Market where I saw some students of a college throwing coloured water on the passengers of rickshaws and cars, specially on the girls, on any pretext of celebrations without thinking its effect on the low-income group people. What is fun to them has become sorrow and loss to others. The students most of whom come from middle class families should think twice before indulging in such kind of (un)kind activities.

Taria Khan  
Green Road, Dhaka

### Inhuman

Sir, A report from Bogra, says that, a father killed his five year old son, on the offence of eating a cooked fish. He then threw the body in a nearby pond. The crime was discovered by the mother, when upon enquiry, she found that the child was missing for a long time. When she asked the father, he was silent; then suspecting foul play, the mother informed the police. The father of the child confessed to the police that he had murdered the child for the fault of eating the fish! It is a strange incident and speaks volumes about what inhuman our attitude can be! This not only reminds us of



Portrait of Rajiv Tiwari, IPS, Afghan President Najibullah outlines his own "moderate, reasonable approach" to a settlement of the Afghan civil war.

role in mobilising international opinion towards a pact which would take the 1988 Geneva accords further.

But he said, "the key to an Afghan settlement is in Afghan hands... this is our top priority."

We have not rejected and will not reject any Afghan group willing to play a role in reaching the noble goal of peace in our common homeland," he said.

Najibullah's statements on the possibility of a "solid agreement" on Afghanistan hinged on the role Pakistan is playing in the civil conflict.

### City development

Sir, A number of high-rise buildings are coming up in different areas of the city which have also high demand on the civic amenities like water, sanitation, drainage, roads etc. But unfortunately, these amenities remain more or less static while the pressure on them due to above reason has increased manifold. Result is apparent. Water supply in the city in many such areas has gone from bad to worse. Condition of sanitation and drainage needs no telling and pressure on roads is mounting.

Now the question that arises in our mind is how can the authorities approve plans for additional habitation without corresponding increase/development in the basic facilities like the ones mentioned above in the areas concerned? Perhaps not only the authorities are different but they differ in their respective approach as well. That is where an integrated approach is called for, for a planned development of any city or town. Dhaka is a classic example of a city being developed in a haphazard manner which is neither contributing to the development of the city nor to the welfare of its residents whose problems continue to multiply with their basic requirements being mercilessly curtailed, — No where in the civilized

world sir, you will find service sector so callous and apathetic towards citizens' basic needs (which are paid for and not free in our country).

H. R. Choudhury  
Mogh Bazar, Dhaka.

### Time-limit for electric bills

Sir, Government deserves thanks for allowing time upto 30-6-91 to enable consumers to pay their arrear bills in three instalments if they clear 50% of the total arrear amount on or before 30-6-91. While on the one hand this step will help to realise government dues substantially, this will on the other hand greatly relieve the consumers in these hard days. But the main objective of this move is going to be defeated as most of the people will not get sufficient time to clear the dues due to long Eid-holidays and just passed 72 hours PDB strike. As such, the consumers will not get any benefit and government dues will also not be realised as expected.

We, therefore request the government to extend the time-limit for payment of dues upto 15th July to enable the consumers to pay their dues.

Abu Saleh  
Moghheel C.A., Dhaka.