

Focus on ME talks

Cry for self-rule across the world

Talks failure will lead to disaster, warns Jordan's Foreign Minister

MADRID, Nov 1: Jordanian Foreign Minister Kamel Abu Jaber to Thursday for true, just peace in the Middle East and warned that failure would lead to disaster, reports Reuters.

Addressing the Middle East peace process, Abu Jaber said, "We hope it will be the start of new dawn for a new era."

Abu Jaber said the peace process needed to be based on the United Nations principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and stressed that Israel needed to trade land for peace.

He greeted several of the conference delegations by name but pointedly ignored Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

The negotiations, he said, must be "firmly anchored on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338" which call for Israeli withdrawal from territories it captured in 1967 in exchange for peace and secure borders.

"Geography cannot guarantee security and security does not come from military might alone," he said in a direct appeal to Israel, whose government rejects the idea of trading land for peace and wants to keep all the occupied territories.

Jaber said Jordan would not accept peace at any price. "We want an honourable peace... a durable peace," he said.

Abu Jaber said Arabs were not guilty for the crimes of the Nazis or for Jewish suffering but had paid the price.

"The world and the Israelis themselves know and are aware of our innocence of our crimes against the Jewish people," he said.

"Our land, our culture, our people, even our very souls, as well as everything we hold dear and sacred, continue to be plundered and distorted to accommodate new realities and manufactured facts, brutally created on the ground," Abu Jaber said in a clear reference to Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.

Addressing Israel, he said: "States too, like people, sometimes commit suicide because of their fear of life, more land is not more security... the building of settlements and the expropriation of land are both in clear contravention of the rules of international law."

But he said the goal of the negotiations was real peace, not just an absence of war, and reiterated Arab demands the East Jerusalem, captured by the Israelis in 1967, should revert to Arab control.

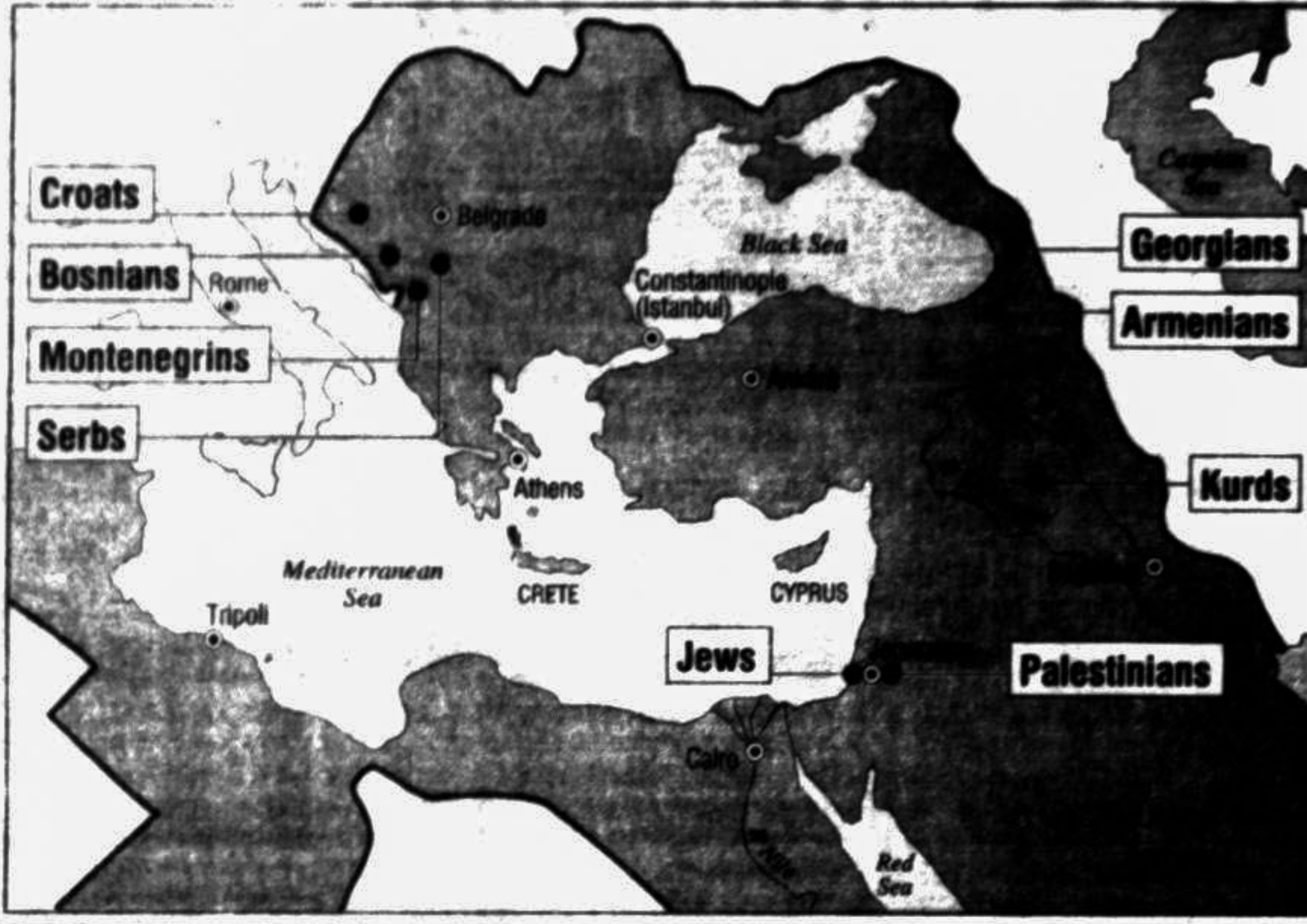
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It's a garden of thorns: Shamir

MADRID: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, after hearing speeches by his Arab foes at the Middle East peace conference, told Israeli radio station on Thursday, "Several days ago I said it would not be a rose garden, but today it has been a garden of thorns," reports Reuters.

The 76-year-old hardline leader spoke after many hours of criticism by Jordan, the Palestinians, Lebanon and Syria.

AP adds: Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, addressing his Arab foes face-to-face Thursday for the first time, said his country felt "a hunger for peace" after decades of conflict.

"Wars have not solved anything in our region," he said at the second day of the historic Middle East peace conference. "There will be obstacles, problems, crises and conflicting claims. But it is better to talk than shed blood."

Shamir made no new, specific proposals on the many disputes between Israel and the opposing parties — Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians.

But he said the peace process was the first step "on the long road to reconciliation."

"I am sure that there is no Arab mother who wants her son to die in battle — just as I am sure there is no Jewish mother who wants her son to die in war," Shamir said, invoking the memory of the hundreds of thousands who have died in past regional conflicts.

"I believe every mother wants her children to learn the art of living, not the science of war," he said.

Shamir was the first speaker on the second day of the conference. He was followed by the chief delegate from Jordan, Foreign Minister Kamel Abu Jaber opened the sessions and introduced Shamir, whose first word was "shalom," the Hebrew greeting that also means "peace."



Multilateral discussions under way

Palestinians for Israel to stop settlements: talks tomorrow

MADRID, Nov 1: Arabs and Israelis are to hold the first session of their bilateral talks here Sunday, and the head of the Palestinian delegation said the focus of discussions would be where to hold subsequent meetings, reports AFP.

Israeli Foreign Ministry official Joseph Haddass on Thursday said the bilateral talks would open in Madrid. That statement was later confirmed by Haidar Abdel Shaif, chief of the Palestinian delegation here.

Abdel Shaif, in an interview with AFP, said first on the agenda of bilateral talks would be to work out the thorny issue of where those talks should be held subsequently.

"Several possibilities exist," Shaif said. But he ruled out the Middle East.

The initial ceremonial stage of the Madrid meeting, consisting of set speeches by the key players on their conditions for peace, began Wednesday and was scheduled to end today.

Israel wants the separate, one-on-one talks to take place alternately in Israel and whichever country — Syria, Jordan or Lebanon — it is negotiating with Yitzhak Shamir has been bringing it up in almost every public pronouncement, and did so again in his speech Thursday, opening the second day of the Madrid conference.

"We submit that the best venue for the talks is in our region, in close proximity to the decision makers, not in a foreign land," he said.

"We invite our partners in this process to come to Israel for the first round of talks, we are ready to go to Jordan, to Lebanon and to Syria."

The Arabs are categoric in their refusal.

The harshest rejection came predictably from Syria, the most powerful of the Arab participants, when Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara said Israeli insistence on the issue aimed at no less than undermining the entire peace process.

If the problem were not the venue of the bilateral, he said, Israel would "create another problem of a different nature."

Arabs also fear that if they agree to shuttle between Israel and their own countries, it could be interpreted as a de facto recognition of the Jewish state before any advance in the peace process.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir on Thursday said the speeches by Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara and

Palstinian delegation head Haidar Abdel Shaif to the Middle East peace conference in Madrid were "extremist", reports AFP.

In an interview with Israeli Radio from Madrid, Shamir said: "The speech by Shara was absolutely extremist and deceitful and that of the Palestinian representative just as extremist but constructed in such a way as to have an impact on public opinion."

He said that according to the two speakers, "there is no room to negotiate."

But Shamir said Israel nevertheless would attempt to pursue bilateral negotiations with Arab parties, adding that it would be necessary to find an "appropriate venue" for the bilateral talks.

The Israel Premier again reiterated that during the bilateral phase, "all problems can be raised."

Shara, in his address to the Madrid conference, said "every inch" of Israeli-occupied Arab land must be returned, Hiyel Shaif said Palestinians were prepared to accept autonomy leading to independence. Shaif also called for a halt to Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.

Meanwhile, six ultra-nationalist Likud members of parliament and several hundred militants held an emergency meeting here to appeal Shamir to remain firm.

Parliamentary sources said the meeting was led by members of parliament belonging to the front for Eretz Israel (Israel plus the occupied territories) who refuse the principle of exchanging land for peace.

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'Madrid talks endorse Arab views'

DAMASCUS, Nov 1: Syria's state-controlled newspapers on Thursday interpreted the opening statements at the Middle East peace conference in Madrid as supportive of Arab views, reports AP.

On the second day of the conference, many people tuned to foreign radio and television stations as on the first day to hear or see live broadcasts of the speeches.

The opening address by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was simultaneously translated into Arabic by some radio stations. Some of Shamir's statements sparked immediate reactions and guffaws from listeners.

"What about you?" was a popular reaction by many Syrians to an appeal by Shamir to the Arab world to recognize and accept Israel in the region.

"Why don't you accept and recognize the Palestinians as equals?" asked one Palestinian refugee, Adnan Qudsi, as other people listening to the live broadcast nodded.

The ball is now in the Israeli court and the Israelis should not swim against the international tide," commented the daily *Tishrin*.

Two other papers, *Al-Thawra* and *Al-Bath* used banner headlines to quote statements by the US and Soviet presidents and the European Community representative at the conference.

*Al-Thawra's* main headline said "Hopps Raised on First Day of Conference."

A secondary headline said "No Peace Without Israeli Withdrawal and Halt to Settlements."

*Al-Bath* also headlined the call by Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev for "respect for the rights of Israeli people."

*Al-Bath* noted that "Israel is still holding its intransigent stands, refusing to halt settlement activity and adhering to the continuing occupation of Arab land."

"Will Israel continue its rejectionist stand, or succumb to the international will?" the paper asked.

Bush pleased over first day's outcome

WASHINGTON, Nov 1: President George Bush is "very pleased" with the first day of the conference in Madrid on Middle East peace, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said Thursday, reports AFP.

Fitzwater said the President followed the debates closely. However, he declined to describe Bush's reaction to the opening speeches in Madrid, notably that of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

He also refused comment on the speech by the chief of the Palestinian delegation demanding the creation of a Palestinian state.

Nevertheless, Fitzwater added that Bush believed it was "very productive in terms of everyone sitting down and indicating a willingness to make this think work."

Israel urged to quit southern Lebanon

MADRID, Nov 1: Comparing the occupation of any of its land to the loss of a vital limb, Lebanon on Thursday used its voice at historic Mideast peace talks to call for Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, reports AP.

Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Bweiz invoked UN Security Council Resolution 425 in the renewed push by his government to get Israel out of a 400-square-mile (1,000-square-kilometer) strip along Israel's northern borders.

The removal of Israel from the Jewish state's self-declared "security zone" carved out by Israel in 1985 following its invasion of Lebanon — is to be the main issue in talks between the two nations.

Lebanon "cannot be fragmented" Bweiz told the delegates. "If Lebanon loses any of its areas, it would lose a vital limb. This would mean bleeding forever."

This occupation and the events and developments which have accompanied it have cost Lebanon and the world very dearly," he said.

Bweiz is part of a government put in power last year when Syria, the main power in Lebanon, drove out Christian Gen. Michel Aoun, ending the country's bloody 16-year-old civil war. The new Lebanese government is reestablishing control over its territory from various militias active during the civil war.

In speaking of UN Resolution 425, he mentioned only Israeli forces, not the 40,000 Syrian troops who control the Bekaa Valley, where many terrorist groups are believed to operate.

Bweiz also said Lebanon was "committed to the Palestinian cause," and wants Israel to relinquish of occupied lands and east Jerusalem, seized during the 1967 Middle East war.

An issue solved at Madrid with scissors

MADRID, Nov 1: Officials at the Mideast peace conference solved a touchy problem in a straightforward manner — with scissors, reports AP.

The United States and Israel objected to the use of the word "international" on the 5,000 press badges printed for the conference, a Spanish official said Thursday.

The American and Israeli governments have had a long-standing objection to any "international" conference on the Middle East because Israel has feared it would be isolated in such a forum.

The current meeting is referred to simply as "The Madrid Peace Conference" on official documents.

But the Spanish had innocently printed "Conferencia Internacional de Paz Para Oriente Medio" on the press cards.

US representatives on the organizing committee advised their Spanish counterparts on Sunday night that the word "international" was objectionable.

Credentials had already been printed and needed to be handed out Monday.

There wasn't any time. The only solution was to cut them up," said a ministry official, who by custom is not identified by name.

"The people who were here sat around cutting them with scissors."



MADRID: Faisal Hussein (L) and Hana Ashravi, Advisors to the joint Jordanian Palestinian delegation address a press conference centred on Israeli Premier Shamir's speech Thursday. — AFP/UNB photo

3 Kach extremists held in Madrid

MADRID, Nov 1: Spanish police arrested Jewish extremist Binyamin Kahane and two other members of his radical Kach party Thursday as they distributed leaflets condemning Israel's participation in the Middle East peace conference, reports AP.

The arrests were the first in connection with the three-day, first round of talks between Israel and the Palestinians and Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

Kahane, the son of slain Jewish Defense League founder Meir Kahane was arrested after distributing leaflets in the hotel occupied by the Israeli delegation.

The party threatened last week to "low up" the peace talks that began Wednesday.

Shamir listens as Palestinians speak in place of PLO

MADRID, Nov 1: The leader of Palestinians at the Middle East peace conference said Thursday he was speaking in place of his people's "acknowledged leadership" — a clear reference to the Palestine Liberation Organisation, reports Reuters.

Haidar Abdel-Shaif, a 72-year-old surgeon from the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip, did not mention the PLO by name and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir listened in stony silence without walking out.

"Our acknowledged leadership is more than just the democratically chosen leadership of all the Palestinian people. It is the symbol of our national identity and unity," Abdel Shaif said.

Shamir had threatened an immediate walkout if the Palestinian delegation mentioned any links to the PLO, which Israel condemns as a terrorist organisation.

Abdel-Shaif called for an immediate halt to Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, the release of all Palestinian political detainees and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.

After each call, he glanced at Shamir who for the first time in the conference seemed slightly uneasy.

Later in his address, Abdel-Shaif did refer to the PLO by name he said.

Shipment marked as agricultural machinery

MADRID, Nov 1: A secret shipment of Soviet tanks to Israel was part of "cooperation in technical defense matters" going on between Germany and Israel for 20 years, Bonn said Thursday, attempting to cool a public outcry over the deliveries, reports AP.

The German authorities have been embarrassed by the discovery by river police in the northern port of Hamburg of a dozen Soviet-made tanks being sent secretly to Israel by the German intelligence service.

On Thursday, the government said it knew nothing about the shipment, with the Defence Ministry, which made the tanks available to the German intelligence service, insisting that the secret service had acted without informing them.

Government spokesman Dieter Vogel said Thursday that the shipment should not have gone ahead without consultation with "politically responsible" authorities and the tanks should not have been falsely declared as agricultural machinery.

The tanks, weighing up to 40 tonnes each, belonged to the former East German Army and were discovered by chance in wooden crates covered with tarpaulins as they were being loaded onto an Israeli freighter headed for Haifa after they had been declared to customs as "agricultural machinery."

They were to have been studied by Israeli intelligence seeking information about similar devices used by Arab states neighbouring Israel.

A list distributed Wednesday by the Defence Ministry indicated that officials of the German secret service arranged the shipment without consulting their superiors or the Chancellor's office.

Vogel said defense cooperation with Israel had been "particularly important" during the years when the former West Germany was "greatly threatened by Soviet military potential."

Earlier this year Germany decided to ship military material to Israel during the Gulf war because Israel's "existence was threatened."

Vogel said Germany would pursue cooperation with friendly countries, including Israel, on technical defence matters.

Bonn admits supplying Soviet tanks to Israel for the last 20 years

MADRID, Nov 1: An Israeli official traced angry accusations with Arab reporters Thursday, each blaming the other for the Middle East peace conflict, reports AP.

The verbal duel, which came on the sidelines of the Middle East peace conference, reflected the depth of the disagreement between the Arabs and Israelis, who cannot even agree on historical events.

"We cannot build on the future without going back to history," said Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister; during the news conference, which was limited to Arab reporters.

"We are told we attacked the Arabs in 1948; we were the ones attacked. We are told we attacked in 1967; we were the ones who were attacked by the Syrians and Egyptians," said Netanyahu.

It was not the first attempt by the warring parties in the Middle East to create an unofficial dialogue. PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat met several years ago with Israeli journalists in Cairo in an atmosphere of accusations and counter-accusations similar to Thursday's impromptu conference.

The questions by Arab journalists were angry, and Netanyahu's answers escalated the bitterness.

"They are liars. He lied about the history and geography of the conflict. How can you start to discuss issues when they lie?" said Ayman Nour, a journalist from Egypt, the only Arab state to have signed a peace treaty with Israel.

"I am a reporter from Ramallah," Nasser Atta, a Palestinian who lives in the Israeli-occupied town, told Netanyahu. "I want my fatherland."

"My father was the mayor of town in the West Bank and you deported him in 1983. You put my brothers in prison. I do not hate Israel but I want to be free and now have to carry my identity card. I want a real answer."

Wrangling over talks venue

Alternate venues have been proposed, such as Cairo or Washington, but the Israelis have remained adamant.

The talks cannot take place in Israel, said Palestinian Hana Ashravi, "so long as Israel is occupying Palestinian and Arab territories. We need a neutral and free place to negotiate."

"We will not negotiate under duress," she said.

Abdel Shaif told AFP that Palestinians would insist during the bilateral talks that Israel halt the building of settlements in the occupies territories.

"If Israel refuses, there will be a problem: This will create an obstacle, an impasse," he said.

Israel has created 146 settlements on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip which have a total population of 104,000.

On the formerly Syrian Golan Heights which Israel annexed in 1981, 33 settlements have been created.

Informed Palestinian sources said the Palestinian delegation would not risk breaking off the negotiations but broach the settlement issue at each round of talks.

It would be useless to enter the third state of the peace process including multilateral talks on regional issues, — water, disarmament, economic development — if no progress was made during the bilateral talks, Abdel Shaif said.

A halt to Israel's settlement policy would mean "progress," he added.

Multilateral talks are due to start two weeks after the opening of the Madrid conference, according to a US timetable.

Abdel Shaif also said US Secretary of State James Baker "congratulated" him on his speech before the conference Thursday.

In his address the Palestinian head delegate said Palestinians were prepared to accept autonomy leading to independence. He also called for a halt to Israeli settlements.

And now a duel with scribes

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