

Former US President Jimmy Carter (L) and his wife Rosalynn (R) carry a panel, Monday, as some 800 volunteers from 11 countries began the construction of 10 homes part of the "Habitat for Humanity International" plan (HFHI). This project, organised by Jimmy Carter and other HFHI leaders, will be the first one to be realised outside the United States. — AFP/UNB photo

## Kashmiri rebels gear up anti-election activities Nat'l Confce to contest polls despite death threats

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 13: Kashmir's main Muslim Party today vowed to contest state legislative elections next month despite death threats from a hardline separatist group, reports AFP.

The pro-India National Conference reiterated that it would run candidates in all 87 constituencies in the Himalayan state, and was ready to face casualties during the campaigning.

"We have to face the threats," its general secretary Bashir Ahmed Kichlu told AFP here. "A couple of casualties will take place. Nobody can help it. We are not going to run away."

The National Conference is the most influential party in Kashmir. India's only Muslim-majority state. It has ruled the state many times and won the last legislative elections held in March 1987.

Although many of its activists have been killed by Muslim militants, it retains a strong network throughout the Kashmir Valley. It is headed by former chief minister Farooq Abdullah, a Muslim.

The Awami League party, which was formed last year by scores of former Muslim militants, also echoed Kichlu's sentiments, saying only elections would end Kashmir's protracted separatist campaign.

"The militants still around will continue to give threats, but now the Kashmiri masses know they are the ones responsible for the bloodshed in this state," said Javed Shah, the League vice-president.

"People are with us. People are sick and tired of all the violence. They want elections. The people want democracy. It is we who have helped to restore normalcy in the state," he said.

On Monday, the Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Harkat-ul-Momneel group warned against participation in the upcoming elections, saying those who did would be killed.

"No one shall be allowed to construct a political empire on the graveyards of thousands of martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of independence," a statement by the group said.

Earlier PTI says, forty-one persons, including 29 militants and five members of a family, were killed and five injured as militants intensified their activities in Kashmir in an attempt to disrupt independence Day celebrations and sabotage the forthcoming assembly elections.

The deceased militants include some top ranking commanders and ten foreign mercenaries.

## Off the Record

### Attacking owls

HONG KONG: At least eight people have been injured in a series of attacks by two owls after their nest was destroyed in eastern coastal China, it was reported Tuesday, says AFP.

The owls began attacking villagers passing by their nest built on an old maple tree in a village in Sanmen county in Zhejiang province on June 3, the Hong Kong branch of China news service said.

The series of owl attacks stated after a little boy destroyed the owl's nest with bamboo pole, and was attacked by the two owls nestling in it.

### Unfortunate simians

KATHMANDU: At least 30 monkeys, thought to come from Kathmandu's famous "monkey temple," were accidentally electrocuted in the Nepalese capital early Tuesday, reports AFP.

Witnesses said the unfortunate simians were electrocuted when a high voltage electrical cable snapped and came down on a barbed wire fence.

The unsuspecting monkeys as usual tried to cross over to a nearby jungle by lifting the barbed wire but they got the shock of their lives, a witness said.

The monkeys were thought to come from the nearby temple of Lord Pashupati Nath, a tourist hunt also known as the "monkey temple" due to thousands of monkeys living there.

Onlookers blamed the government for running high voltage lines overhead, instead of opting for an underground wiring system as used in other countries.

"It could have been people instead of the monkeys. It is sheer negligence by the electricity authority," Hari Prasad Uprety, another witness said.

He also revealed in a statement that warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who controls the north of Afghanistan, had promised to reopen Kabul's most vital road artery linking it to the north.

The ceasefire, which analysts said marked a symbolic success for the new premier, started at 8:00 am (0930 BST) today and will last until a round of peace talks between the two sides is over, he said.

For the time being agreement has been reached for a general ceasefire in the north of the country," he said in a communique issued by his office.

"Under this deal, the ceasefire will be effective from Tuesday morning and will remain in force until the announcement of the results of the talks between our two groups," it added.

Earlier AFP says: Pakistan agreed Monday to reopen its embassy in Kabul and offered to host a conference of Afghan leaders to find a solution to the country's factional war, officials said.

The agreement to reopen the embassy, burned in a mob attack last September, was reached during a meeting between Pakistani Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali and a visiting high-level Afghan government delegation.

Israel's new headline government has taken a first, small move to develop Jewish settlement on occupied land even as Arab anger grows, reports Reuters.

On Monday Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai announced he had approved placing some 300 mobile homes at Educational and Public Institutions at Jewish settlements in the West Bank ahead of the school year.

The move was the first on settlements since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government on August 2 lifted restrictions on Jewish settlement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip imposed by the previous government.

Mordechai's statement also said he had approved a new procedure aimed at "progressing" the stages of approval for building on the occupied lands. It did not elaborate. More than 130,000 Jews live amid nearly two million Arabs in the areas.

The announcement came shortly after Netanyahu, at a news conference with Arab journalists, said Israel's interim peace deal did not bar settlement building.

An anti-abortion demonstrator dressed as the 'grim reaper' protests abortion policy outside the San Diego Convention Centre on Monday, site of the Republican National Convention. The Republican convention, which will select the Republican presidential candidate, will run August 12-15.

Most recent closure began and more than 100,000 before the government began imposing restrictions three years ago.

Unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza is about 50 per cent and the average daily wage for unskilled labourers is about 10 dollars — less than half what some boys earn in Israel.

Hmeidat said most boys are just trying to earn extra money during summer vacation. But some, he said, are their families only breadwinners.

Jamil Moussa — a tile worker who earned 65 dollars a day in Israel before the closure but now makes a fifth of that in the West Bank — has three sons, ages 12, 13 and 16, working in Israel.

The boys income goes to help support a family of 13 and

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The world has tried for 40 years to ban nuclear test explosions and put an end to the arms race. The 61-nation Conference on Disarmament is trying to complete the negotiations in time for the treaty to be signed at the UN General Assembly in September.

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But the environmental group Greenpeace accuses China and Russia of purposefully trying to scuttle the accord by refusing to make concessions to India.

## Novel protest against child slavery

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The demonstration was organised by the centre of Concern for Child Labour (CCL), a non-governmental group opposed to child slavery, which is widespread in the country.

The children, aged six to 12 years and drawn from poor families carried placards denouncing child employment and demanding the right to education.

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The announcement was made by Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Mahmoud Mohammadi following the statement of Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati on Iran's decision to go to arbitration in protest against the US violation of international conventions.

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Most of them were living under trees in snake-infested jungle near irrigation lakes because of drought while others sought sanctuary with friends and relatives.

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## BRIEFLY

**Subash Mukherjee wins Akademi:** Noted Bengali poet Subash Mukherjee was awarded fellowship of the Sahitya Akademi at a function in Calcutta Monday, PTI reports from Calcutta.

The fellowship is the Akademi's highest honour conferred on Indian writers. Mukherjee was selected with six others for the fellowship at a meeting of the Akademi on February 23, according to the Akademi's regional secretary, N K Bhattacharjee.

**Pandit Vishnu Kant dies:** The freedom fighter and veteran journalist, Pandit Vishnu Kant Malviya, died at his residence in Allahabad yesterday after a protracted illness. He was 84. PTI reports from Allahabad. He was the grand son of Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya. He was the chief reporter of the All India Radio (AIR) Allahabad till his retirement. He is survived by a son and two daughters.

**Sweden to host confce on child abuse:** A total of 122 countries have signed up to attend a world congress in Sweden later this month on the sexual exploitation of children, the organisers said, AFP reports from Stockholm.

"We don't know whether representatives will come from all these countries. Some may not have the money. But we are counting on about 100 countries," said Lisbeth Palme, president of the committee organising the August 27-31 Congress. The Congress will seek to adopt a declaration against the sexual exploitation of children and a plan to action to put it into effect, Palme said at a press conference Monday.

**Peace talks fizzle out in Mexico:** Peace talks in southern Mexico fizzled out Monday after discussions on political reform deteriorated into bickering over democratic and legal changes, AP reports from Son Indres.

The six days of talks had been expected bring a settlement between the government and Chiapas Indian rebels who staged an uprising in 1994. Discussions degenerated early Monday, however, with the lead rebel negotiator, accusing the government of offering "miserable, feeble proposals" on democratic and judicial reforms.

**Typhoon heading towards Japan:** A powerful typhoon was expected to sweep Japan's southern most main island of Kyushu as early as late Tuesday as it slowly continued to head northeast, AP reports from Tokyo.

Some 54,000 households on Okinawa, about 1,600 kilometres (1,000 miles) south of Tokyo, and several other small southern islands have suffered blackouts since Monday night because of the storm, local power company officials said. Electric supply was restored to some parts of Okinawa as the typhoon slowly moved away Tuesday morning. But most houses on Amami Oshima, a smaller island about 300 kilometres (186 miles) northeast of Okinawa, where the typhoon is currently approaching, continued to be affected.



Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan (C) and Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto (L) walk together after his arrival on Monday. — AFP/UNB photo

**US freezes Stinger missile sale to Taiwan**

WASHINGTON, Aug 13: The United States has frozen a Stinger missile sale to Taiwan because the White House promised China there would be no new arms sales to Taiwan this year, a defence publication reported Monday, says AFP.

Defence news said Washington quietly had approved the 300 million dollar arms package in May, but that the State Department and White House were now reconsidering their commitment to Taiwan to move forward on the sale.

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## Troops detain over 50 people in Srinagar

SRINAGAR, India, Aug 13: Indian paramilitary troops have detained more than 50 people in a hunt for separatist rebels in Srinagar, summer capital of the troubled state of Kashmir, before Thursday's Independence Day ceremonies, reports Reuters.

Police officials said the arrests were made over the past week after troops cordoned off Srinagar's residential areas. The rebels have targeted India's Independence Day celebrations during a five-year revolt against New Delhi's rule.

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## Chechens propose talks on ceasefire in Grozny

MOSCOW, Aug 13: Chechen rebels proposed talks on a ceasefire in Grozny today, rebel spokesman Movladi Udugov told AFP, as a rebel offensive in the capital raged into its eighth day.

The separatists sent a representative to Russian commanders to "propose a meeting Tuesday at midday" (0800 GMT) between senior rebel officers and representatives of Russian forces commander Konstantin Pulikovski, Udugov said.

The rebels were awaiting a response, he added.

AP adds: Russian troops battled Chechen separatists in Grozny for an eighth day Tuesday, despite assurances from Boris Yeltsin's security chief that his intervention has brought the sides closer to a ceasefire.

Alexander Lebed said Monday that he and separatist military leader Aslan Maskhadov agreed on negotiations for a ceasefire and for withdrawal of rebel fighters from Grozny, the Chechen capital, now gripped by some of the fiercest fighting since the

war began in December 1994. The rebels continued to control the city centre Tuesday, driving around in cars and four-wheel-drive vehicles. The Russians answered with tank, mortar and sniper fire, but there was no sign of a Russian ground assault to retake the centre.

Maskhadov and Gen. Konstantin Pulikovski, acting commander of federal troops in Chechnya, began talks Monday afternoon by telephone, Lebed said. But on Tuesday, the Interfax news agency reported that Maskhadov had not been able to reach the federal command by telephone Monday.

The rebels said they were trying to set up talks with Russian military leaders Tuesday.

Lebed, Yeltsin's special envoy to the region, returned to Moscow on Monday after a secret meeting with rebel commanders, and blasted the Russian military for mishandling the war. He said he plans to take personal charge of Russia's military operations in breakaway Chechnya, where a

week-old rebel offensive has left hundreds of Russian soldiers dead and wounded.

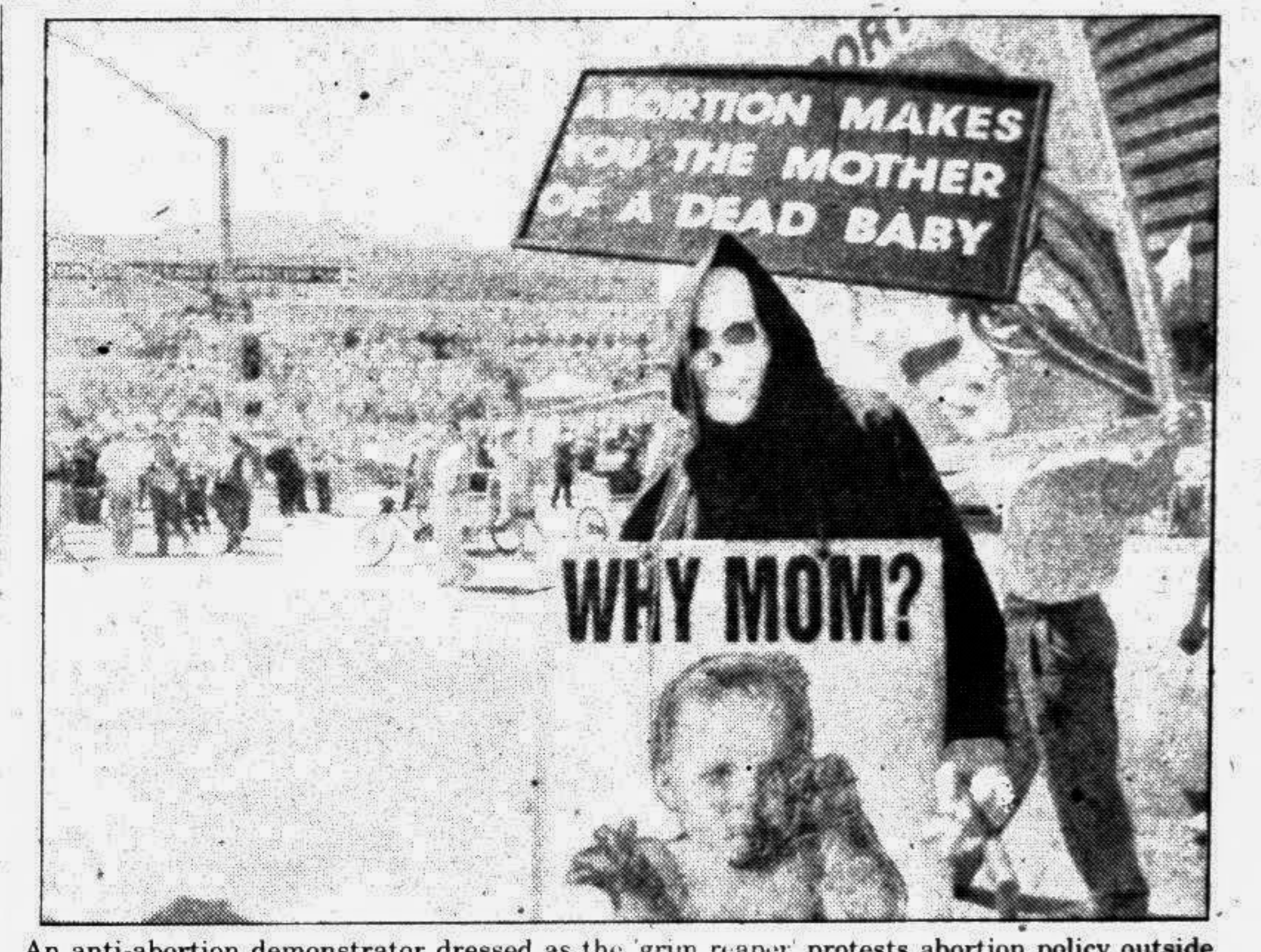
The separatists continued to attack government buildings Tuesday, and there was heavy sniper fire, apparently from both sides. Russian helicopters fired rockets, and Russian tanks and mortars near the old presidential palace shelled civilian areas throughout the night.

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## Palestinian boys intrude into Israel to earn money for their families

BANI NAIM, West Bank, Aug 13: Just after dawn, 9-year-old Mahmoud stood tensed on a rocky path leading from the West Bank into Israel, waiting for a signal, reports AP.

A whistle sounded and Mahmoud, a dark-eyed Chamer clutching a sheaf of peacock feathers nearly his height, took off running. A minute later he was in Israel, crammed into a taxi and headed for Jerusalem.