

Taliban enter Panjsher valley

KABUL, Oct 2: Taliban-controlled Kabul radio said today that Taliban forces had entered the Panjsher valley, the stronghold of former government military chief Ahmad Shah Masood, reports Reuters.

It said the Taliban had made some gains during its advance late on Tuesday, but gave no more details.

There was no word on casualties.

The radio said the front-line near the Salang Tunnel between Taliban forces and those of northern Uzbek militia leader general Abdur Rashid Dostum was quiet.

There was no provocation in Salang between Dostum and Taliban, the radio said.

The Taliban on Tuesday dismissed an ultimatum sent by a Dostum commander to Dostum's forces the previous day

that told Dostum to stand aside and let the Taliban cross the Salang Pass over the formidable Hindu Kush mountain range.

Taliban Acting Deputy Foreign Minister Sher Mohamed Stanakzai told reporters on Tuesday that the ultimatum was unauthorised and not valid.

"Whoever handed over that letter was an enemy to us and Dostum," Stanakzai said.

A Taliban commander at the Salang front, Mullah Ghulam Mohammad, told a visiting United Nations official in the presence of reporters on Monday that he had asked Dostum's forces to stand aside because the former communist general "does not represent the people of the north," but said Dostum appeared bent on confrontation.

Stanakzai said the Taliban

had decided to drive Masood's forces out of the Panjsher Valley, but had no quarrels with Dostum.

Masood withdrew to his Panjsher heardland base when Kabul fell to the Taliban with hardly a shot being fired.

"So far, we have no problem with Dostum, and we hope this will be solved through negotiations. We don't want more fighting," Stanakzai said. "We hope for a mutual understanding with Dostum."

AP adds, Afghanistan's ousted government dismissed Taliban fighters as Pakistani puppets and called on the United Nations to send a mission to investigate ties between the militia and Afghanistan's neighbour.

In an official statement, the ousted government also said it would continue its work despite

the Taliban's seizure of the capital of Kabul.

Afghanistan is convinced that the military invasion of Kabul by the "Pakistani-recruited and equipped" Taliban is a "clear violation of all resolutions ... of the United Nations," the statement said.

It urged the United Nations to immediately send a fact-finding mission to Afghanistan "to witness and assess the level and degree of cross-border intervention here."

Afghanistan is prepared to present evidence, including captured Pakistani officers, to any such mission, the statement said.

Pakistan has denied supplying manpower to the rebels.

AFP says, the victory of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban faction in Afghanistan

poses a threat to Central Asia and Russia, the Russian national security chief Alexander Lebed said Tuesday.

Lebed said that if the Taliban, "backed by Pakistan," manage to "wipe out" the Russian border posts in Tajikistan, "the road to the plains to the north would be open," Interfax reported.

Lebed said the Taliban wanted to annex parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

If Moscow does not take serious diplomatic steps to bring order in Afghanistan, the 21-month war in Chechnya "will look like a small sore" in comparison, he said.

Lebed, who negotiated a peace accord ending the Chechnya war, was a general in the Soviet paratroopers during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, which ended in 1989.



Mubarak emerges as Egyptian hero

CAIRO, Oct 2: President Hosni Mubarak has emerged as a hero for many Egyptians after he dared to defy the United States and refused an invitation to join Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a Middle East summit, reports AFP.

"After years of kow-towing to the Americans the rais (president) has given us back our honour," said carpenter Yasser Sabri, 36.

"It is a master stroke," Yasser said, using a local expression used to describe the "challenge posed by former president Gamal Abdel Nasser to the West" when he nationalised the Suez Canal in 1956.

Even the opposition daily Al-Wafd, which generally criticises Mubarak hailed the chief.

"Our leaders were right to ask for a postponement of the summit because holding it under such extreme conditions without good preparation and in the absence of specific Israeli commitments will lead to an escalation of violence."

US Supreme Court to rule on 'right to die'

WASHINGTON, Oct 2: The Supreme Court agreed to decide whether states may ban doctor-assisted suicides, setting the stage for a momentous ruling on the "right to die," reports AP.

Six years after recognising a constitutional right to refuse lifesaving treatment, the court said Tuesday it will decide by July whether doctors can be barred from actually giving life-ending drugs to mentally competent, terminally ill patients who no longer want to live.

Most states have such laws, but lower courts this year struck down assisted-suicide bans imposed by New York and Washington state. By reviewing those two rulings, the justices are expected to set national guidelines.

"This is one of those water-

shed legal issues that will be out there until the nation's highest court makes a decision," Washington Attorney General Christine Gregoire said after learning of the court's action.

Susan Dunshee, president of the Seattle-based Compassion in Dying group that successfully challenged the Washington law, said the court now has "an opportunity to benefit patients throughout the country."

The constitutional right to die was first recognised by the Supreme Court in 1990. Assuming that such a right exists, the justices said then that a terminally ill person may refuse lifesustaining medical treatment.

Just last year, however, the justices rejected a challenge by Dr. Jack Kevorkian to Michigan's ban on assisted suicide.

BRIEFLY

18 killed in Nigeria road mishap

At least 18 Nigerians died in road accidents as they celebrated the creation of six new states by military ruler General Sani Abacha, newspapers reported yesterday, Reuters reports from Lagos.

The Punch said 12 people died in two crashes in the new northern states of Gombe and Zamfara. The vanguard said six others died when their vehicle somersaulted from a convoy of others celebrating creation of central Nassarawa state. Abacha on Tuesday created six new states, making a total of 36, as the next step on his timetable to restore civilian rule by October 1998.

Food poisoning infects 205 in Japan

The food poisoning bacteria that killed 11 people nationwide earlier this summer has infected 205 people in northern Japan, a health official said Wednesday, AP reports from Tokyo.

But only 20 of those infected have developed severe symptoms, such as stomach pain, diarrhoea and bloody stools, said a local health official, who identified himself only by the surname Sato. All 205 cases discovered were found among students and staff of an elementary school in the northeastern prefecture (state) of Iwate. Sato said. Of the 205 infections with the O157 strain of E. Coli, 198 were students and seven were employees of a school in Morioka, 462 kilometres (286 miles) north of Tokyo.

ROK consul found dead in Russia

A South Korean consul to Russia's eastern outpost of Vladivostok has been found dead, the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday, AP reports from Seoul.

Choi Duk-Kun, 54, was found dead in the stairwell of his apartment building at about 9:00 pm (11:00 GMT) local time, the ministry said in a statement. Choi had a severe head wound, and his personal belongings including cash and passport, were found intact in his pockets, it said.

Fujimori pardons 3 newsmen

Three journalists jailed for suspected links to terrorist organizations walked out of a maximum security prison Tuesday after being pardoned by President Alberto Fujimori, AP reports from Lima.

The pardons, signed under a new programme designed to free innocent people imprisoned under Peru's harsh anti-terrorism law, came on Journalist Day in Peru. Human rights activists claim as many as 700 innocent people are serving time for terrorism, in Peruvian jails. Under a new law passed in August, a special government commission is reviewing the cases and will recommend presidential pardons for those it believes are innocent. Fujimori has said he will sign 25 pardons in October.

Elderly people more likely to experience heart problems Mondays

WASHINGTON, Oct 2: Long after they retire, some elderly people are more likely to experience heart problems on Mondays than on many other days of the week, researchers at the University of Kentucky say, reports AP.

Their study, published in the journal "Circulation," says this phenomenon might be caused by the heart's ability to recall the stress of starting the work week.

Another explanation, the study says, might be that some people experience stress upon seeing their wives or children go to work.

The researchers studied 683 elderly people wearing a defibrillator, a device that regulates the function of the heart and determines when patients experience arrhythmias, life-threatening disturbances in heartbeat.

Such disturbances occurred on Mondays 21 per cent of the time, the study says.



Opposition leader and chief of the Pakistan Muslim League, Nawaz Sharif (R) called on Ghinva Bhutto (L) yesterday to condole the death of her husband Murtaza Bhutto. Murtaza died in a shooting incident with police September 20, along with six of his supporters. —AFP photo

UN lifts sanctions against Y'slavia

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 2: The UN Security Council voted unanimously to lift sanctions imposed against Yugoslavia in 1992, a sign of international recognition of Serbia's role in helping to bring peace to the Balkans, reports AP.

The council suspended the sanctions in November after Serbia, which forms the bulk of what remains of Yugoslavia, signed the peace accord last year that ended 3 1/2 years of fighting in Bosnia. Tuesday's action formally removes the sanctions.

The measures were imposed because of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's role in fomenting Serb separatist movements in neighbouring Croatia and Bosnia as part of his dream of a "Greater Serbia."

But last year Milosevic played a crucial role in moves toward a Balkan peace, signing the Dayton accord on behalf of Bosnian Serbs — a treaty they had opposed. He also chose not

to respond when Croatia's army retook most rebel Serb-held territory in Croatia last year.

The results of the embargo, combined with the costs of economic mismanagement and war, devastated Serbia and Montenegro.

Per capita income is now dir 1,000, half of what it was in 1987. Foreign debt stands at about dir 8 billion. Inflation runs about 100 per cent a year. Officially, nearly half the 745,000 people in the work force are unemployed.

In suspending the sanctions last year, the council said the measures would be formally lifted 10 days after free and fair elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which took place Sept 14.

But the United States insisted that the council wait until international monitors from the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe certified the elections as free and fair.

Russia insisted that the sanctions be lifted last Thursday, 10 days after the Bosnian elections. But foreign ministers of the Contact Group on the former Yugoslavia — the United States, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and Italy — agreed last week to lift the sanctions as soon as certification arrived.

It came on Sunday, and the following day State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns said the United States was satisfied that conditions for lifting the sanctions had been met.

"I think it's the right thing to do," Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov said. "It's an important phase of the implementation of the overall settlement in the former Yugoslavia."

The Security Council reserved the right to reimpose the sanctions if the parties to last year's Dayton peace accord fail to adhere to the pact.

Clearly, it is up to all the parties to the Dayton agreement to continue to honor that

agreement," British Ambassador John Weston said.

"If at any point we feel that one party or another is in serious dereliction of its duties under Dayton, we're obviously going to have to look at that again."

But council diplomats said it was unlikely Russia would approve any reimposition.

The resolution does not release Yugoslavia's assets frozen because of claims by other states of the former Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia.

It also does not permit Yugoslavia to rejoin the UN General Assembly and other world organizations such as the International Monetary Fund.

Lavrov said there was no longer any excuse for excluding Yugoslavia. But Western European countries have linked Yugoslavia's readmission to progress in settling ethnic conflicts in its restive Kosovo province, which has a predominantly Albanian population.

Blair seeks votes to deliver a new 'age of achievement'

BLACKPOOL, England, Oct 2: Opposition leader Tony Blair staked out his claim to become Britain's next prime minister with a powerful and emotional appeal for voters to trust his Labour Party to deliver a new 'age of achievement,' reports Reuters.

In an impassioned address to the party's annual conference, Blair sought to win over an electorate that last returned a Labour government 22 years ago. At the same time he tried to placate traditional socialists hostile to his radical bid to modernise the party.

"Today I offer you, and we offer the country, a new vision," Blair said. "If we are to build this new age of achievement, you and I, and all of us together, must first build the decent society to deliver it."

"A society in which every individual is valued, every person given a chance to develop their potential, a society to which we

contribute and which contributes to us."

Blair's voice quivered with emotion as he said he had learned the importance of family and community when his father became seriously ill during his childhood.

"Strong families are the foundation of strong communities," he said.

Blair said improving education and the skills of the British workforce, halving youth unemployment, making the public sector more efficient and forging a new constructive relationship with the European Union would be the primary goals of his government.

He spelled out a corporate-style "performance contract" and invited the nation to judge him on it after Labour's first five-year terms.

But rather than dwelling on policy details, Blair's aim was to outline a strategy for restoring Britain's self-confidence and

banishing a sense of national decline.

Promising to lead a "great, radical, reforming government," Blair said his three main priorities would be "education, education and education."

He reminded Labour supporters that they still had to overcome some scepticism among voters. "The British people want change. I am sure of that. But they need to trust us."

With a general election due by next May, it was vital that the speech should touch all the right bases. The rapturous reception it received from delegates, and the admission by some normally cynical journalists that they had been moved by it, suggested it had.

The Sun, Britain's best-selling tabloid newspaper and normally a staunch supporter of the ruling Conservatives, was completely won over by the speech.

This was more than just a conference speech. It was a personal manifesto delivered with conviction by a man of decency and courage," said an editorial in the paper, which in 1992 claimed it had won the election for the conservatives.

Bookmaker William Hill was also impressed, cutting the odds on Labour winning the next election to 1-3 from 2-5 in the aftermath of Blair's speech. The odds on the conservatives winning were lengthened to 2-1 from 7-4.

But not everybody was happy. Prominent Labour politician Clare Short, who was demoted from the party's transport spokeswoman to overseas development spokeswoman after an earlier row over her outspoken comments on tax policies, said Blair's tight control of the party was "paralysing our creativity" a BBC report said.

Signatories to CTBT stand at 101

UNITED NATIONS, Oct 2: Five states signed the Nuclear Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty on Tuesday, bringing the total signatories to 101, UN officials said, reports AP.

The pact provides for an end up nuclear test explosions.

The treaty has the explicit backing of the five declared nuclear powers — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — which all signed the pact last Tuesday when it was opened here for signing.

But before the treaty can come into force it must be signed and ratified by 44 named states with a nuclear capacity, including the three threshold nuclear states, India, Israel and Pakistan.

India has declared it will not sign, therefore blocking its implementation, and Pakistan followed suit, Israel has signed however.

UN officials said that as of Tuesday, seven of the 44 listed states had signed.

EU demands junta to release 500 NLD detainees

LUXEMBOURG, Oct 2: The European Union demanded Tuesday that Myanmar's military authorities release the 500 pro-democracy activists detained in recent days and resume talks with the opposition, reports AP.

Foreign ministers from the 15 EU nations issued a statement calling for the "immediate and unconditional release" of all the detainees.

The EU said the National League for Democracy of Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi should be allowed to resume its normal activities.

However, the EU stopped short of threatening retaliation if the Myanmar's authorities failed to free the prisoners.

Clinton confers honorary US citizenship on Mother Teresa

WASHINGTON, Oct 2: President Clinton conferred honorary American citizenship on Mother Teresa, saying the world's most famous Roman Catholic nun has demonstrated "how we can make real our dreams for a just and good society," reports AP.

In signing a congressional resolution making Mother Teresa an honorary citizen, Clinton said Tuesday that since founding the Missionaries of Charity in 1950, "she has brought hope and love into the lives of millions of orphaned and abandoned children the world over."

Scandinavian may get Nobel Literature Prize '96

STOCKHOLM, Oct 2: The Swedish Academy will Thursday award the 1996 Nobel Prize for Literature, which could go to a Scandinavian writer for the first time in 22 years, Swedish literary critics said, reports AP.

Speculation is rife over who will succeed last year's winner, Irish poet and writer Seamus Heaney, to win the first prize of the 1996 Nobel season. As is the case each year, the academy has remained tight-lipped on its intentions.

Although the Scandinavian "lead" is often raised in Stockholm literary circles — Swedish poet Tomas Transtromer and Danish novelist Villy Sorensen in particular — some critics believe the award will go to either Wislawa Szymborska of Poland, Cees Noteboom of the Netherlands or Bei Dao of China.

Lasse Lindler, literary critic for the Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter, told AFP that these five names, along with that of Roa Bastos of Paraguay, are on a list of "serious candidates" mentioned by Knut Ahnlund, a member of the Swedish Academy who recently quit the body.

It is considered unlikely that the prize will go to an anglophone this year. Since 1991, the prize has gone to a writer of the bard's tongue four times.

French writers have been ignored since 1985 when Claude Simon won, in which case Aime Cesaire — originally from Martinique — stands a good chance.

Rewarding a poet two years in a row is not entirely impossible, according to critics, who note that it has happened several times since the award was first presented in 1901, five years after the death of the creator of the prize, scientist Alfred Nobel.

There are also several recurring favourites, including Lobo Antunes and Jose Saramago of Portugal, Dutch-language writer Hugo Claus of Belgium is a possibility, who, along with Bei Dao of China, both write in languages that have never been rewarded by the Swedish Academy.

At Stockholm's literary cafes, other names have been tossed around: Lebanese poet Adonis, Albania's Ismail Kadare, Tchingiz Altmatov of Kirghizstan, Michel Tournier of France and his compatriot of Czech origin Milan Kundera, Guenter Grass of Germany, Peter Handke of Austria, Peru's Mario Vargas Llosa and Carlos Fuentes of Mexico.

Also mentioned is British author Salman Rushdie, who wrote "The Satanic Verses," a book which caused lively debates among the life members of the academy and which cost the author a death sentence issued by Iran.

Benazir believes Murtaza's killing aimed at destabilising country

LONDON, Oct 2: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has said that she believes the shooting death of her politician brother Murtaza 11 days ago may have been intended to help cause instability in Pakistan, reports Reuters.

"I made a lot of enemies and I feel that perhaps my brother's death was part of the work of my enemies as a way to destabilise the whole structure," Benazir told Sky Television news on Monday in an interview in London.

Murtaza, 42, who was estranged from his sister and opposed her politically, died in a

shoot-out between police and his supporters in the port city of Karachi on September 20. Seven of his bodyguards also died in the shooting.

"They said it was crossfire. I didn't believe it when I went there," Benazir said. "I saw his body and I talked to the doctors and he had been shot with single bullets to kill him. He had four bullet injuries in his face."

The Pakistan government has ordered a judicial inquiry. Benazir paid a brief visit to Britain on her way to the United States and met with Prime Minister John Major.

NATO expansion Russia's 'no' to remain unchanged

GENEVA, Oct 2: Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin on Tuesday said Russia's opposition to NATO's eastward expansion would remain unchanged, reports AP.

"We must do everything to maintain the situation as it is on the European continent, and we must not gamble with these questions now," said Chernomyrdin, questioned by journalists, after talks with Swiss Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti.

"We are against NATO's enlargement to the East, particularly in as far as military and defensive issues are concerned," Chernomyrdin said.

Moscow's position on NATO was well known.

"We will not stray, we will stick to our line and continue to do so," he said.

standing united side by side.

"As a Palestinian and a son of Palestine, I cannot watch my people die and see Israelis shoot them and stay quiet," said an 18-year-old policeman in blue fatigues, who like others refused to give his name.

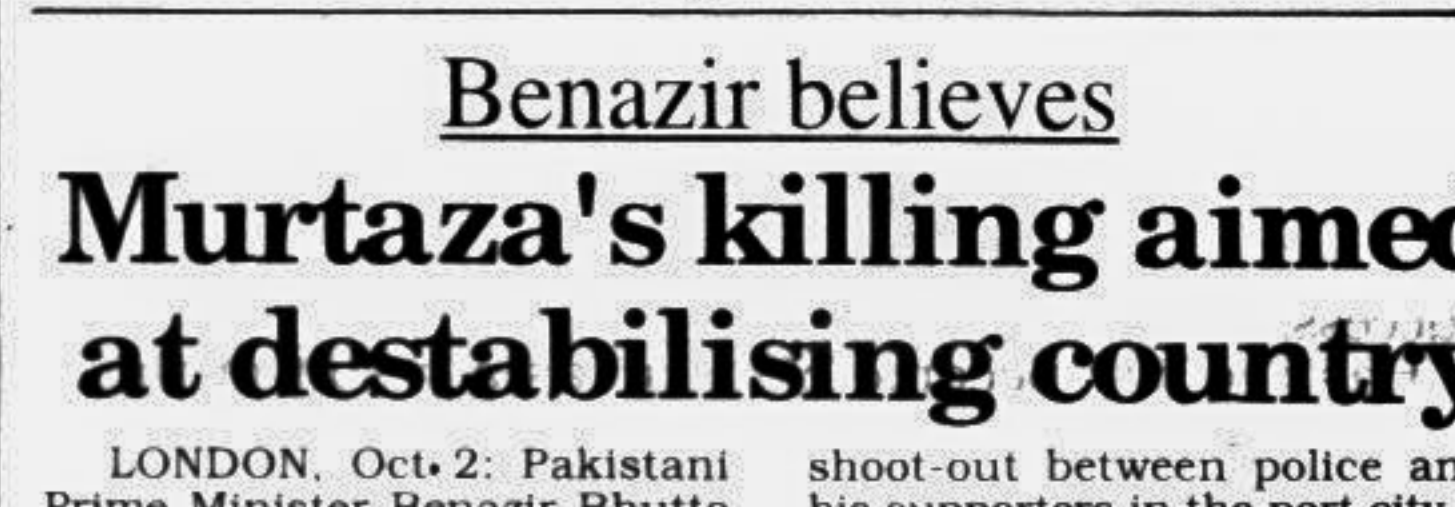
His opinions were echoed in the still-angry streets of Ramallah, 10 kms (6 miles) from Jerusalem.

In shops that had been shuttered for days during the unrest, people spoke with pride of watching their police in action. With youthful bravado, teenagers said it sent a message to Israel not to push them around.

That kind of talk infuriates Israeli officials, who permitted the police to carry the weapons in the first place.

"The trust has collapsed," Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, a retired general, said on Israel TV.

Mickey Mouse and Roy Disney look upward as fireworks are launched during the rededication of the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, on Tuesday, for 25th anniversary of the opening of Walt Disney World.



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Palestinian cops anger Israel, but they are heroes at home

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Oct 2: With rifle in hand, a Palestinian policeman hands out posters of a comrade slain during "The Battle of Jerusalem," the title Palestinians have given to the four days of bloodshed across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reports AP.

Against the posters a pale blue backdrop is the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's most resonant images.

To the side of Lt Jihad Samhan's picture is written "heroic martyr," a sentiment shared by many Palestinians who until last week had little good to say about their cops.

The gun battles between the police and Israeli troops may have shattered the Middle East peace effort, but they have done wonders for Palestinians' tarnished image of Yasser Arafat's security forces.

After months in which they

looked more like the hired hand of the Israeli army, the 30,000 armed men are basking in a glow they knew only in the first days of self-rule.

Palestinian demonstrators are accustomed to throwing rocks and getting shot at. Seeing their policemen fire back made many of them euphoric. Demonstrators cheered, flashed victory signs, danced and clapped.

"We had waited for this for years," said the 22-year-old plainclothes officer handing out the posters. "Everyone fought together."

Such talk is not discouraged by the Palestinian Authority, which badly needs a boost for its police. But it raises questions about one of the fundamentals of the peace agreement — cooperation on security, including joint Israeli-Palestinian patrols. And calls

are mounting in Israel to disarm the cops.

"Without faith and without trust, it is difficult to continue with the agreement," said Maj. Gen. Oren Shahor, the Israeli government's chief adviser on Palestinian affairs.

For the people of the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian police are the most tangible sign of the statehood they crave.

Drawn from the far-flung domains of the PLO in exile or recruited from the legions of youths who fought in the Palestinian uprising, the men are divided into nine branches that wield overlapping authority in Gaza and parts of the West Bank.

Israel envisioned the police force as just that — a police force — and wanted it to direct traffic and keep order. But later it put tremendous pressure on the force to crack down on

Islamic militants responsible for suicide bombings in February and March.

For many Palestinians, it did that job too well. Hundreds of fundamentalist supporters have been jailed for months without charge, and human rights workers and journalists who have spoken out against Arafat's government have themselves wound up in jail.

Complaints of torture are common, and at least eight prisoners have died in Palestinian custody. In August, thousands turned out to protest a prisoner's death.

"The authority had a lot of trouble with the people. They were frustrated and they had lost hope," said Mohammed Khalil, a spokesman for the authority in Ramallah. "The gap was very obvious."

Then, last week's clashes erupted, set off by Israel's deci-

sion to open a tunnel near Muslim holy places in Jerusalem.

Palestinian police began shooting after seeing Israeli soldiers fire tear gas, rubber bullets and sometimes live rounds at stone-throwing protesters.

For Israelis it was a nightmarish spectacle.

The battles were chaotic. In minutes, Palestinian policemen went from trying to restrain protesters to firing on Israelis. Then the tables would turn again, and policemen would try to disperse Palestinians. So it went for three days of fighting in which 58 Palestinians, 15 Israelis and three Egyptians would die.

On Wednesday and Thursday, during the peak of the clashes, Arafat's Voice of Palestine radio station talked about police and protesters

standing united side by side.

"As a Palestinian and a son of Palestine, I cannot watch my people die and see Israelis shoot them and stay quiet," said an 18-year-old policeman in blue fatigues, who like others refused to give his name.

His opinions were echoed in the still-angry streets of Ramallah, 10 kms (6 miles) from Jerusalem.

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