

Taliban regain territory in southwest

KABUL, June 2: Battered by advancing opposition forces the Taliban religious army on Sunday reported its first military gains in several days, reports AP.

Southwest of the beleaguered capital, enemy Shiite Muslims pushed the religious militia to within 40 kilometres (24 miles) of Kabul.

But on Sunday the Taliban army used artillery, rockets and mortars to drive back the advancing Shiite army to roughly 70 kilometres (42 miles) from Kabul. The Taliban also was in firm control of most of Wardak province.

The front line Taliban commander, Mohammed Zaheer, said his soldiers were ready for a major offensive into Bamyan province, the Shiite stronghold.

"We are waiting for our orders," he said.

North of the capital, soldiers loyal to Kabul's deposed military chief Ahmed Shah Massoud were battling Taliban soldiers at Charikar, about 60 kilometres (36 miles) away.

Last week the Taliban religious army controlled roughly 90 per cent of the country after sweeping into the north in an alliance with ethnic Uzbek soldiers, who had ousted northern warlord Rashid Dostum.

But the alliance fell apart when the Taliban tried to disarm its new friends.

At Charikar, the Taliban said it had several thousand soldiers on the battlefield and was receiving reinforcements from Jalaluddin Haqqani, a powerful commander from eastern Afghanistan.

The Taliban's army is sepa-

rated at the Salang Tunnel, roughly 120 kilometres (78 miles) north of Kabul. Opposition soldiers blew up the northern end of the tunnel trapping Taliban soldiers inside and leaving an estimated 3,000 stuck on the other side, separated from the main body of troops.

There were reports of sporadic fighting in several northern provinces. It was impossible to independently confirm these reports.

The Taliban now control two-thirds of the country and its enemies, who have formed an alliance, control the northern one-third.

Pak recruiting agencies barred from sending women abroad

ISLAMABAD, June 2: The Pakistan government today barred private recruiting agencies from sending women abroad for employment, following the repatriation of 25 female workers from Malaysia, reports AFP.

The ban was ordered by Interior Minister Chaudhury Shujaat Hussain who also said an inquiry would be conducted to determine how the women workers were sent to the southeast Asian country, state-run television reported.

The women were flown back to Pakistan this week after reports they had been allegedly maltreated and subjected to hardship in Malaysia.

Socialist-led opposition wins French parliamentary polls

PARIS, June 2: France's socialist-led opposition scored a stunning parliamentary election triumph in Sunday's decisive second-round runoff, forcing President Jacques Chirac to share power with a hostile left-wing government, reports Reuter.

Socialist Party Chief Lionel Jospin, who will be asked today to form a government, said the people have voted for a change of direction in European policy. But he did not call into question the planned single European currency.

With 567 constituencies declared, the socialist and their non-communist allies, including the Ecologist Greens, fell short of an absolute majority in the 577-member National Assembly. To rule they will need the support of the Communist Party, which won 38 seats.

Just 40 minutes after polling stations closed, Conservative Prime Minister Alain Juppe went on television to concede defeat.

"The people have spoken. Their decision is sovereign. We all respect it. I wish those who will now govern France good luck and I wish France good luck," the outgoing premier said.

"We did not manage to convince the French people that we were going in the right direction," he admitted.

The result was a crushing defeat for Chirac's centre-right coalition, which lost almost half the 464 seats it held in the outgoing Lower House.

Seven ministers lost their seats, including Justice Minister Jacques Toubon, number two in the outgoing cabinet.

Government sources said Chirac, who dissolved the Assembly on April 21 saying he needed a "new clan" to lead France into a single-European currency from a position of strength, would call on Jospin to form a new government.

It will be the third time in 11 years that France has had a period of left-right power-sharing.

Seats	Outgoing	Won
Extreme-Left	0	0
Communist Party	23	37
Socialist Party	55	237
PRS	5	12
Other left	9	15
Ecologists	0	7
Independents	0	0
RPR	236	129
UDF	201	105
Other right	27	13
National Front	0	1
Extreme-Right	0	0
Total	556	556

known as "cohabitation."

The Ecologist Greens enter parliament for the first time with seven seats. The extreme-right national front, despite polling 15 per cent in the first round, won just one seat.

National Front leader Jean-Marie Le Pen said Chirac had suffered a double defeat and should resign.

Jospin has said the supports European economic and monetary union but would not impose a further bout of austerity

to meet the strict criteria to qualify for the single currency in 1999.

In a statement in Cointegabelle, near Toulouse, he said the result was "a demand for justice, a demand for a profound renewal of our public put at the service of man, a demand for a reorientation of European construction — which we favour — and a demand for a scrupulous attention the problems French people meet in their daily lives."

Miert said: "It seems to be a large majority that will be in favour of the Euro. I don't think this is going to change anything as far as the Euro is concerned."

Communist leader Robert Hue, a declaring "a great hope is born," said his party hoped to join "a government of the whole left" on the basis of a joint policy declaration issued with the socialists in April which did not mention the single currency.

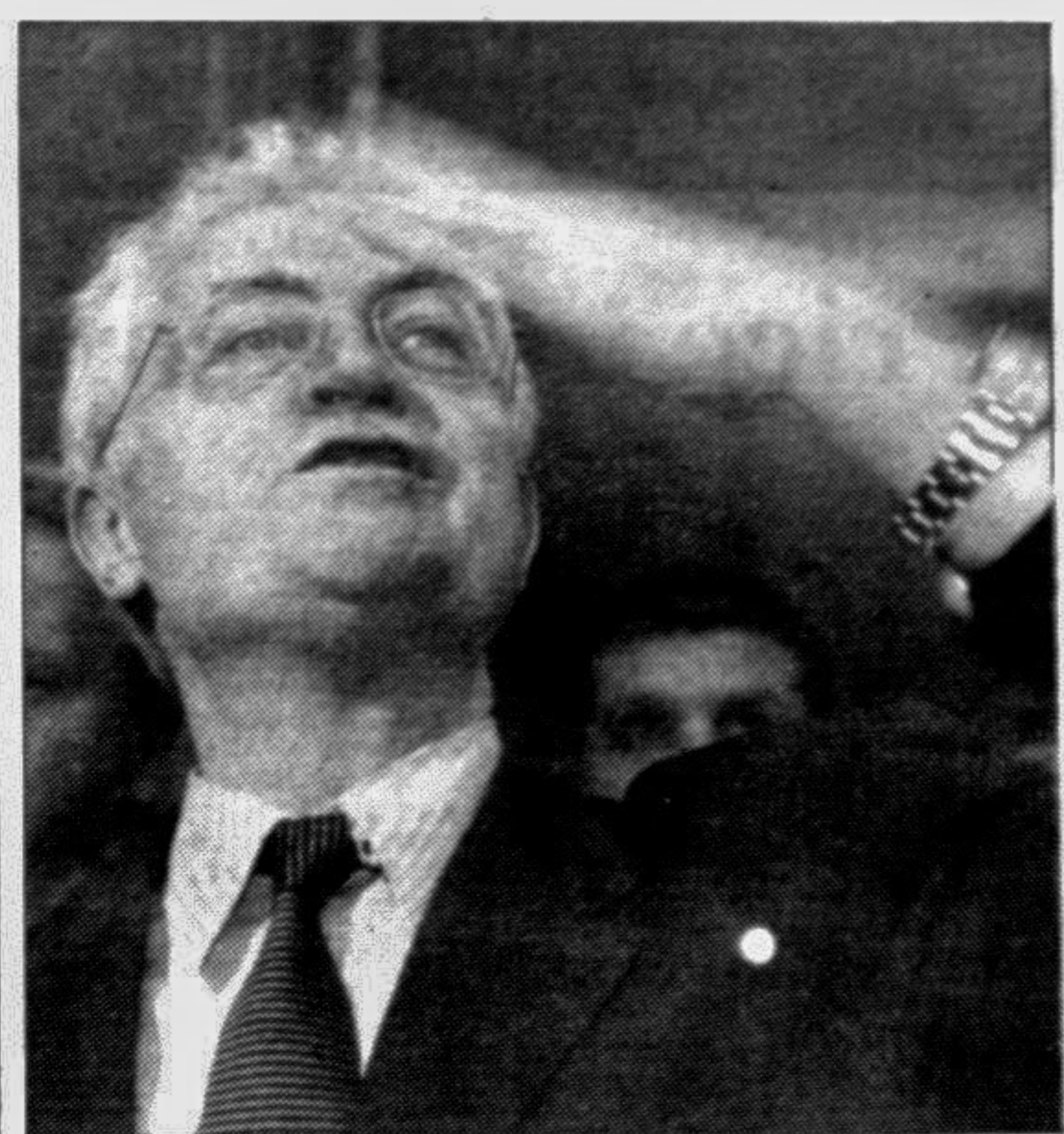
The socialist have pledged to create 700,000 jobs for young people, half of them in the public sector, over the next three years, and reduce the working week from 39 hours to 35 over five years without loss of pay.

Hundreds of cheering socialist supporters gatecrashed the movement's Victory party at a left bank pairs cultural centre, overwhelming guards who had orders to admit only 2,000 invited guests and journalists.

Another report says: Following is the latest state of the count in the decisive second round of France's election for the 577-seat National Assembly, held on Sunday, according to the interior ministry.

A total of 289 seats is required for an absolute majority. The first table shows which parties held the seats counted so far in the outgoing parliament, followed by the new state of the parties for the same seats.

The second table gives the number of votes won and the percentage share of the national popular vote.



French Socialist Leader Lionel Jospin waves to supporters Sunday in Cointegabelle, southwestern France, after the announcement of the first computer projections saying his Socialist-led opposition party won the general elections. Jospin, expected to be France's next premier, pledged a "different politics" for France, and said he would push for a "reorientation" of Europe.

Foes oppose Myanmar's ASEAN membership

BANGKOK, June 2: Foes of Myanmar's ruling military government, including students in exile and rebel groups, today denounced ASEAN's weekend decision to admit Myanmar as a member in July, reports Reuter.

There was no statement on the issue from the beleaguered Burmese opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) of pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, which has always urged the regional grouping to delay Yangon's admission.

Repeated attempts to reach NLD leaders for comment by telephone in Yangon failed.

The NLD had cited repression by the ruling State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) as its reason for calling on ASEAN not to admit Yangon.

ASEAN groups Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and Vietnam.

The group said Myanmar, along with Cambodia and Laos, would be admitted in late July. Its decision came despite pressure from the United States not to admit Myanmar because of human rights concerns.

The US State Department on Sunday said it regretted ASEAN's decision on Myanmar but was counting on ASEAN members to urge SLORC to enter into dialogue with local democratic forces.

The Karen National Union (KNU), which is among a handful of ethnic rebel groups fighting SLORC for greater autonomy for the eastern Karen state, said the ASEAN decision could derail efforts for a peace settlement in Myanmar.

Turkish PM for snap polls

ANKARA, June 2: Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan called for snap elections to resolve a row between his Islamist-led coalition and Turkey's secularist generals, but the way forward was not immediately clear, reports Reuter.

No date was set for polling and there were no guarantees that a complicated handover of power would not go away and give the opposition a chance to set up its own secularist government.

Erbakan, the first Islamist to head the government of modern Turkey, committed himself to stepping down in favour of coalition ally Tansu Ciller, a secular conservative, within a month as part of a deal to go for early elections.

The election date was not given. But Mrs Ciller told a news conference she held with Erbakan that the vote would place within an "appropriate time limit."

No exact date was announced either for the switching of the reins. Erbakan said it would take place in the second-half of June.

Erbakan must first give his resignation to President Süleyman Demirel, a veteran of the volatile political scene in Turkey, a secular state with an overwhelmingly Muslim population.

AP adds: Deputy Prime Minister Tansu Ciller announced Sunday she was taking over the premiership from Islamic leader Necmettin Erbakan later this month, a year ahead of their power-sharing deal, and would lead Turkey to early elections.

The election date was not given. But Mrs Ciller told a news conference she held with Erbakan that the vote would place within an "appropriate time limit."

No exact date was announced either for the switching of the reins. Erbakan said it would take place in the second-half of June.

Titanic, Chicago lead '97 Tony Awards

NEW YORK, June 2: Can Tony float "Titanic"?

That's the question Broadway is asking after the show with the season's most unlikely subject matter — the famous 1912 sea disaster — won five 1997 Tony Awards Sunday, including best musical, reports AP.

The 10 million dollars production, plagued by technical problems before its premiere, opened to mixed reviews and tepid but slowly rising ticket sales.

The musical reportedly needed an infusion of another million dollars after its opening to keep running until the Tonys held at Radio City Music Hall.

"Titanic" also picked up prizes for its composer-lyricist Maury Yeston, author Peter Stone, set designer Stewart Laing and orchestration Jonathan Tunick.

Best play honours went to "The Last Night of Ballyhoo," Alfred Uhry's remembrances of growing up in a Jewish household in 1939 Atlanta.

"Titanic" was a surprise winner during a smooth-running awards ceremony, which featured a genial Rosie O'Donnell as host. The televised ceremony offered few other unexpected winners.

As expected, the critically acclaimed revival of Kander and Ebb's "Chicago" also won big, taking six awards, more than any other show. Besides winning as best musical revival, it took the top musical performance prizes — for stars Bebe Neuwirth and James Naughton; director, Walter Bobbie; choreographer, Ann Reinking, and lighting, Ken Billington.

"This one's for you Bobby," she said tearfully, saluting the late Bob Fosse, the show's original director and choreographer.

Another big winner was the revival of Henrik Ibsen's classic "A Doll's House." The play received four major prizes including awards for its star, Janet McTeer, who plays the Petulant Nora, and Owen Teale, who portrays her domineering husband.

Only minimal variations in the voting results are expected when they are announced by the Election Board later this week.

If no candidate wins a majority, Congress will choose between the top two vote-getters. Such a vote would be held when lawmakers convene their new session on August 4.

Kesri certain to win Cong (I) presidency

NEW DELHI, June 2: The controversial chief of India's Congress (I) Party, Sitaram Kesri, is "certain" to get elected as the party's president for a second term despite mounting opposition, a party source said today, reports AFP.

"Kesri will certainly win the election," a senior leader of the 112-year-old party said on condition of anonymity.

"More than 70 per cent of the 8,000-odd Congress state members are with him. The other contenders will not win," the source said.

It will be the first contest for the Congress presidency in two decades as all the earlier three presidents were elected by "consensus".

The source said a Congress presidential candidate required to be nominated by at least 10 top provincial members and for Kesri "there was no dearth of support, as each top state (Congress) officials were vying with each other to nominate him."

The 77-year-old Kesri became party president in September 1996 after the resignation of former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao following corruption charges.

Three other senior leaders have challenged Kesri for the party's president's post.

Sharad Pawar, a member of the Congress decision-making body, said he was determined to

defeat Kesri in elections due on June 9.

Pawar has asked the party's electoral college to throw out the incumbent Kesri, saying "the real need is to project a younger leadership. There is a yearning for change within the Congress."

Nikolai Tikhonov dead

MOSCOW, June 2: Nikolai Tikhonov, the Soviet prime minister from 1980 to 1985, died Sunday at the age of 92, ITAR-Tass said, reports AFP.

Tikhonov died from lung inflammation at Moscow's Central Clinical Hospital, agency said, quoting the elite clinic.

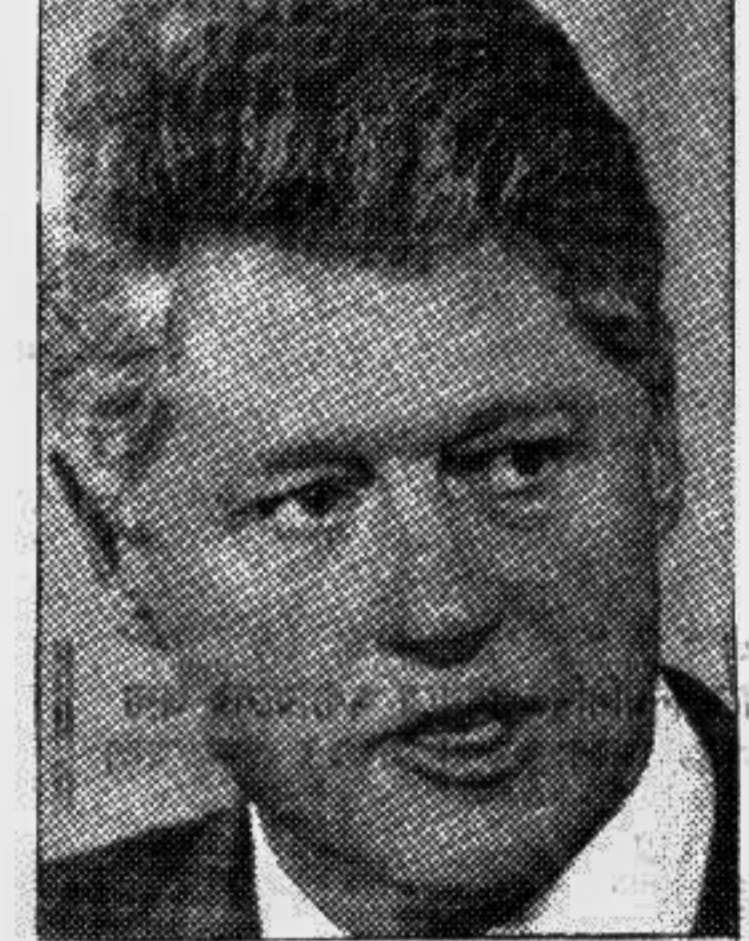
Born in 1905 in Ukraine and starting his career as an assistant train driver, he rose through the ranks of Soviet industry, becoming deputy minister for non-ferrous metallurgy in 1955.

A close ally of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, he became deputy chairman in 1963 of Gosplan, the Soviet state planning committee, which managed the USSR's economy.

In 1976 he became first deputy chairman of the council of ministers and in 1980 became chairman, the position equivalent to prime minister.

Ready to defend rather than apologise

WASHINGTON, June 2: President Bill Clinton is ready to defend himself in court rather than apologise in the sexual harassment case that Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, has brought against him, Clinton's personal lawyer said today, reports Reuter.



Throwing down a gauntlet, the lawyer, Robert Bennett, said Clinton "is not going to apologise," one of three conditions for an out-of-court settlement established by Joseph Cammarata, a lawyer for Jones.

"I was listening to Mr Cammarata last night, and the president of the United States is not going to apologise," Bennett said in an interview taped for the ABC news programme "this week," one of a series of his scheduled television appearances on Sunday.

Rebels abduct PNG MP ahead of nat'l polls

PORT MORESBY, June 2: A Papua New Guinea Member of Parliament has been kidnapped while campaigning for national elections on the secessionist island of Bougainville, the Papua New Guinea government said today, reports Reuter.

John Momis, the member for Bougainville in the national parliament, was abducted on Sunday by members of the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), the government said.

A member of his staff was taken with him at from Timputz, a regional centre on north Bougainville, it said.

Momis is a strong supporter of the Papua New Guinea government on the issue of Bougainville, where rebels have been fighting a secessionist war for nine years.

The BRA has said previously it plans to disrupt national elections, which are due to begin June 14.

Bougainville came to international attention earlier this year when an army revolt stymied government plans to use mercenaries to put an end to the uprising.



Several of the 1997 Tony Award winners pose Sunday with their awards at Radio City Music Hall in New York. Best Leading Actor in a Musical James Naughton is left, Best Actress in a Musical Bebe Neuwirth is second left, Best Leading Actress in a Play Janet McTeer is second right, and Best Leading Actor in a Play Christopher Plummer is right. Naughton and Neuwirth both won for their roles in "Chicago" and McTeer for "A Doll's House" and Plummer for "Barrimore."

Killing of Arab land dealers jeopardizing ME peace move: Israel

JERUSALEM, June 2: The Israeli prime minister's spokesman said Monday that future peacemaking with the Palestinians is being jeopardised by the killing of Arabs who sold land to Israelis, reports AP.

Spokesman David Bar-Ilan said Yasser Arafat's self-rule government was behind the killings of three Arab suspected land dealers and the disappearance of a fourth.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu summoned security chiefs to an emergency meeting to discuss what steps to take with the Palestinian Authority and how to protect both Jewish and Palestinian real estate agents whose lives are in danger, Bar-Ilan said.

risk the continuation of the peace," Bar-Ilan told The Associated Press.

"Obviously, these are acts of hostility, war and murder. Such acts are dangerous to the continuation of the peace talks."

Speaking on Israel army radio, Bar-Ilan said Israel had to "examine seriously whether we have to continue talks with people who represent such fascist theories."

Netanyahu, in a separate interview with army radio, said the killings had been carried out with the help or the encouragement of Palestinian officials.

"We will take all the steps necessary to bring justice to the victims and prevent more murders," he said.

ported that 16 Palestinian land dealers who sold or planned to sell land to Jews were on a hit list compiled by the Palestinian Authority. The newspaper said the information was based on a secret Palestinian report obtained by Israeli security officials.

The report said the Palestinian Authority had decided to eliminate any land dealer who sells to Jews.

On Saturday, police found the body of Ali Jamhour, the third suspected land dealer killed in the past month. Two of those killed had Israeli citizenship.

The attack followed warnings by Palestinian officials that the death penalty should be imposed on anyone who sold land to Jews.

He didn't name the official, but Israel Radio identified the man as Col. Tawfik Thrawi, who is based in the West Bank city of Ramallah. The radio said Israel

may seek his extradition.

Izhaki called a news conference after Israeli police arrested six Palestinians, some of them armed, and said they were caught near Jerusalem attempting to kidnap a Palestinian land dealer, Assad Rajabi.

"We have firsthand evidence of the involvement of a head of security in the Palestinian Authority," Izhaki said.

On Saturday, police found the body of Ali Jamhour, the third suspected land dealer killed in the past month. Two of those killed had Israeli citizenship.

Justice Minister Freih Abu

Medein denied any involvement by Arafat's government in the deaths and said the accusation was "part of a campaign against the authority."

Medein said Israel was responsible for the killing, since Jamhour's body was found in an Israeli-controlled area of the West Bank. Meidein said Israeli intelligence agencies killed Jamhour after using him to conclude the land deals.

Ikrema Sabri, the Palestinian-appointed chief Muslim cleric in Jerusalem, said Jamhour's body could not be buried in a Muslim cemetery because of his land-dealing.

Hafez Barghouti, editor of the al-Hayat al-Jadida newspaper in Ramallah, said he had received a telephone call Saturday claiming responsibility for

the killing.

The caller, speaking in Arabic, said "We, the guardians of the Holy Land, declare our responsibility for the killing of Jamhour because he sold land to Jews," Barghouti said. The group had not been known previously.

Martin Indyk, the US ambassador to Israel, said Sunday that the United States condemns the killings "unreservedly."

"These killings must stop," he told The Associated Press. "Beyond the unacceptability of extra judicial killings, they send a terrible message to Israelis and they're having a damaging impact on the Palestinian Authority's standing in Washington."