

## Palestinians, Israel resume talks

RAMALLAH, West Bank, Nov 11: Israelis and Palestinians met for a second round of talks today on a permanent settlement for the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza, reports AFP.

The two delegations, led by Israeli diplomat Oded Eran and Palestinian Culture and Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo, met at the Best Eastern Hotel in the West Bank city of Ramallah, for about an hour and a half and were to resume their talks later.

About 30 demonstrators gathered outside the hotel, demanding that Israel free its Palestinian prisoners and blasting the continuation of Jewish settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Inside the hotel, the Palestinian negotiators were fiercely critical of the settlement policy of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who has ordered the dismantling of only 10 of 42 unauthorised outposts.

They also attacked Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak for the narrower interpretation he produced this week of UN resolution 242 calling for an Israeli withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967.

The two sides were expected Thursday to set the agenda for their so-called final status framework accord, which is scheduled for completion in mid-February. The final status agreement itself is supposed to be finished in September.

## 4 hurt in ex-KGB building fire in Moscow

MOSCOW, Nov 11: Four Russian secret service employees were injured with burns, one seriously, when fire swept through the FSB (ex-KGB) building on Lubyanka Square in Moscow early today, ITAR-TASS reported, says AFP.

Firemen evacuated nine other staffers through windows of the blazing building.

Firemen were called at 2:15 a.m. (5:15 a.m. BST) after the blaze started in an office on the first floor of the notorious secret service building and spread rapidly.

ITAR-TASS said the fire was extinguished by 3:44 a.m. (6:44 a.m. BST) but firemen continued to search for possible victims in the smoke-filled building.

The cause of the blaze was not immediately known.

The former KGB building, in the city centre near the Kremlin, is seen as a symbol of Soviet-era repression.

## Nine killed in West Bengal clash

NEW DELHI, Nov 11: Nine people were killed in a street battle involving rival political groups in the communist-ruled Indian state of West Bengal, a newspaper reported today, reports AFP.

Members of the state's ruling Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) and a small opposition leftist group, the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI) clashed Wednesday over a plot of land near the town of Joyntagar, the Times of India quoted the police as saying.

West Bengal, bordering Bangladesh, has been ruled by communists since 1977.

## Sharif's party vows to fight conspiracy case

KARACHI, Nov 11: Loyal party supporters of former Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif vowed today to fight conspiracy accusations against their ousted leader, reports AFP.

Sharif, who was unseated in a bloodless military coup last month, has been accused of conspiring to kill the country's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

He will also be investigated for kidnapping and attempting to hijack a plane carrying the general and if convicted, could face the death penalty, police said.

His party, the Pakistan Muslim League, told AFP they will fight a legal battle for Sharif.

"I was deeply hurt when I saw it in the newspapers, but the decision has been taken that the party will defend Nawaz Sharif at any cost," said Haleem Siddiqui, a senior party leader and

former lawmaker.

"It is shocking and unfortunate," he said. "We are ready for a legal battle and will seek justice through courts."

The party's legal aid committee would now examine the case, he said.

"I hope he will be tried in open court and not in special anti-terrorist courts. I hope it will be a fair and impartial trial," he said.

But Sharif's political opponents, the Pakistan Peoples' Party led by former premier Benazir Bhutto, had little sympathy.

"It is no surprise nor is it shocking," said Reza Rabbani, a senior official in the party.

"Sharif is to be blamed for the present situation. He should blame himself more than anybody else," he said.

He tried to politicise the institution of the army and victimise politicians through his

former lawmaker.

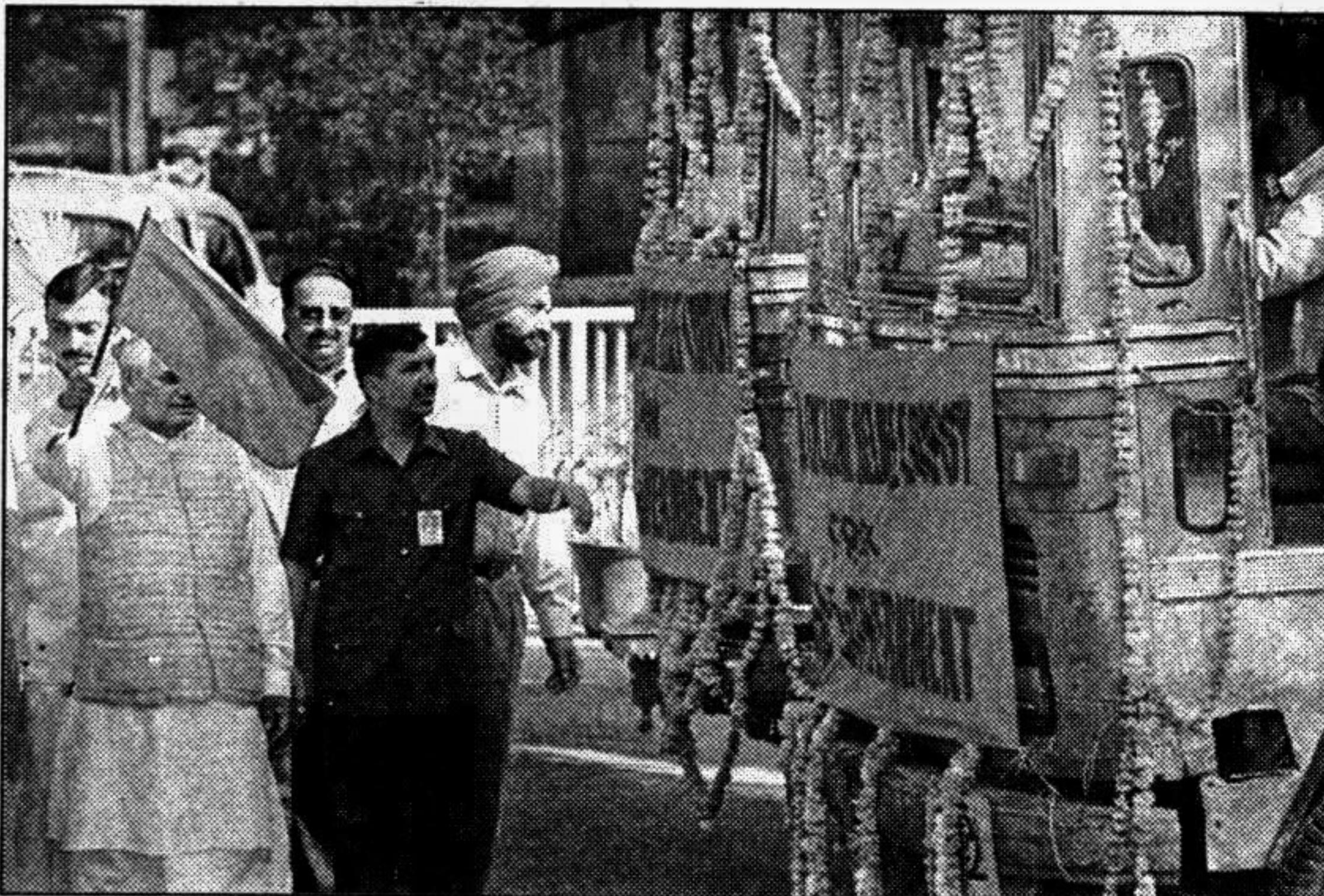
"But we demand the army restore democracy and hold elections as soon as possible."

**Sharif's legal rights should be respected : US**

The United States on Wednesday called for Pakistani authorities to respect the legal rights of ousted premier Nawaz Sharif and reports he and others have been officially accused with criminal conspiracy.

"We have continued to raise our concerns with Pakistani authorities about former prime minister Sharif's well-being and our concern that he be accorded due process," State Department spokesman James Foley.

Foley said Washington had yet to confirm the charges had been pressed, but said US officials would be looking closely into the matter.



Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (L) flags off trucks laden with foodstuffs on their way to the cyclone-struck state of Orissa yesterday. The aid, donated by the government of Punjab, will be distributed amongst survivors of one of the country's worst cyclones in which 8,000 people have already perished.

— AFP photo

## Chechnya no longer Russia's 'internal affair': OSCE

SELETSOVSK, Russia, Nov 11: Signalling that the West would not stand idly by while Chechnya is bombed, an OSCE mission leader here Wednesday declared the war was no longer an "internal affair" of Russia, reports AFP.

The Chechen conflict has grown outside the framework of Russia's internal affairs," said Kim Traavik, leading an Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) team to refugee camps in Ingushetia.

He said the OSCE intended to present a peace initiative to Moscow on Thursday aimed at ending the two-month-old conflict, adding that the body would do everything in its power "to bring peace to Chechnya."

His comments followed a warning by a top Russian general that Moscow was digging in

for a long offensive, one that could possibly last three years.

Western powers, which have so far agreed with Russia that the conflict is a Russian internal matter, like the 1994-1996 Russian-Chechen war, have nevertheless increased their protests about the civilian casualties in the latest conflict.

The dozen-strong OSCE mission was mobbed by a crowd of 50 anxious refugees when they toured this Ingush camp just three kilometres (two miles) from the border with war-torn Chechnya.

"They are killing us, we are cold, help us," one person cried out.

The Slepetsk camp, home to some 8,000 refugees, mainly women and children, was covered in snow Wednesday, with temperatures well below freezing.

More than 200,000 civilians have fled Chechnya since the Russian military offensive began on September 5 with the declared aim of wiping out "terrorists" blamed for a wave of apartment block blasts which killed 292 in September.

The majority have come to Ingushetia, which itself has a population of only 340,000.

Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev said Russia hoped to end its offensive against Chechnya before the end of the year, dismissing reports of a possible military revolt should the war be halted for political reasons.

"There is a chance that the operation will be over before the end of the year," Interfax news agency quoted him saying today.

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The other three militants were said to be local Kashmiris.

"Heavy firing is going on since morning, and it appears both sides are using sophisticated weapons," Muneer Ahmed, a resident of Sopore, told AFP over telephone.

Panzipura is located close to the apple-growing centre of Sopore, which was a bastion of Muslim guerrillas until 1994.

Traavik said the two sides were gutted in a blaze sparked by the fire.

The gunbattle is still continuing, a police officer said here.

Inspector General of Police Gopal Sharma told AFP the dead rebels included two Pakistani including Abu Harare, the local chief of Lashkar-e-

Tayaba, a Pakistan-based hardline Muslim militant group.

The Mars planet orbiter, a key craft in the space agency's exploration of the red planet, vanished after a rocket firing September 23 that was supposed to put the spacecraft on station around Mars.

An investigation board concluded that NASA engineers failed to convert English measures of rocket thrusts to Newton, a metric system measuring rocket force. One English pound of force equals 4.45 newtons.

A small difference between the two values caused the spacecraft to approach Mars at too low an altitude and the craft is thought to have smashed into the planet's atmosphere and was destroyed.

The spacecraft was to be a key part of the exploration of the planet.

## UN war crimes investigators exhume 2108 bodies in Kosovo

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 11: UN war crimes investigators have exhumed 2,108 bodies from gravesites in Kosovo and expect to find more victims of the conflict next year, the chief prosecutor told the UN Security Council on Wednesday, reports AP.

Carla del Ponte's briefing provided the first official figures on the number of victims, and indicated that the final death toll might be lower than NATO's estimate that some 10,000 ethnic Albanians were killed by Serbs during the 78-day bombing campaign.

The war crimes tribunal for Yugoslavia, which del Ponte has received reports from witnesses and intelligence sources that 11,334 people were buried in 529 common graves in Kosovo.

Over the past five months, del Ponte said, forensic teams from 14 countries examined 4,266 of the graves where

4,266 bodies were reported to have been buried. The teams discovered just 2,108 bodies, she said.

Del Ponte cautioned, however, that the number of bodies exhumed doesn't necessarily reflect the number of actual victims — because there was tampering at some graves, and at "a significant number of sites" a precise count couldn't be made because bodies were burned or dismembered.

Most of those found were ethnic Albanians killed by Serbs during the conflict but there were also a small number of graves containing Serb victims, deputy chief prosecutor Graham Blewitt said.

Rescue workers from all over Italy dug out 13 injured survivors from the mountain of rubble, all that was left of the six-storey building in the town of Foggia.

Local officials estimate up to 71 people were inside the block when it collapsed shortly before 4:00 a.m. (0900 BST).

Among survivors were two children aged one and 10 who lived on the top floor and escaped with only cuts and bruises.

Earlier four bodies, including that of a 10-year-old child and two men aged 26 and 28, were taken from the wreckage.

Public prosecutors have already launched a criminal investigation for suspected homicide and impounded all administrative documents relating to the construction to determine the cause of the collapse.

"Such sanctions are against the ongoing international trend of free global trade," Asefi said.

According to the minister, the decision to uphold the "inefficient" sanctions merely deprived American companies from being present in the Iranian market and was only to their disadvantage.

On Tuesday, US President Bill Clinton renewed US economic sanctions against Iran and said troubled relations between Washington and Tehran had not been "fully restored."

Over the past few months, the US government has sent some signals to moderate Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in the hope of improving relations between the two nations.

The overtures, however, were rebuffed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other conservative religious leaders in Iran.

**Faulty metric conversion caused loss of Mars orbiter**

WASHINGTON, Nov 11: Failure to convert English measures to metric values caused the loss of the Mars planet orbiter, a spacecraft that smashed into the planet instead of reaching a safe orbit, a NASA investigation concluded today, reports AP.

The Mars planet orbiter, a key craft in the space agency's exploration of the red planet, vanished after a rocket firing September 23 that was supposed to put the spacecraft on station around Mars.

An investigation board concluded that NASA engineers failed to convert English measures of rocket thrusts to Newton, a metric system measuring rocket force. One English pound of force equals 4.45 newtons.

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Rescue workers and medical team members search through debris after a building that housed some 90 people collapsed in Foggia early Thursday. Police said it was feared there were many dead.

— AFP photo

## Seven killed in Italy building collapse

Japan urged to maintain donations to UN

TOKYO, Nov 11: UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Thursday urged Japan to keep up its financial contributions despite slow progress on Tokyo's bid for a permanent seat on the Security Council, reports AFP.

Japan is campaigning for a permanent place in an expanded version of the UN's most powerful body. Currently only Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States have permanent seats and the right of veto that goes with them.

The UN chief said Japan would be a "worthy member" of a reformed UN Security Council.

"I know that Japanese policymakers and public alike feel growing frustration about the prospects for council reform," he said in a speech to the United Nations University here.

"The discussions are indeed moving too slowly, especially given that this is a crucial question for the entire future of the United Nations," he conceded.

## LTTE warns of further attacks Civilians start fleeing Vavuniya

an inquiry into the debacle.

Sri Lankan soldiers, backed by armoured personnel carriers, patrolled the Vavuniya or took positions behind sandbag bunkers on Thursday. A military spokesman in Colombo said reinforcements had been sent.

"We are there and if the terrorists shell the area, we will attack them back," Brig. Sunil Tennakoon told The Associated Press. "We are not going to abandon the town," he said.

The guerrillas who overran 10 army camps last week in the northern Wanni Jungle, claimed they lost 115 fighters and killed 1,000 government soldiers.

The army says 101 soldiers have been killed and 743 wounded. But soldiers returning from the front have said hundreds of army troops were killed. The army chief, Gen. Sri Lal Weerasooriya, has ordered

"We have requested both the sides not to involve civilians. We are worried about civilian suffering and hardship," said Red Cross spokesman Harsha Gunawardene.

asked residents to leave by Thursday morning. Almost 90 per cent of Vavuniya's residents are Tamils. More than 3,000 of them fled overnight and 12,000 left Thursday.

"We fear our attack may cause hardship to the people," said the warning, broadcast on the radio and printed in leaflets. "We are urgently requesting civilians living in Vavuniya to leave the area."

Government offices and schools were closed. Twenty-two of the 25 doctors at the town's hospital have fled, an official said on condition of anonymity.

The rebel radio, Voice of Tigers, monitored in Vavuniya, 120 kilometres (130 miles) north of the capital, Colombo,

US defence system vulnerable to Russian missiles: Albright

WASHINGTON, Nov 11: Russian missiles would be able to pierce the limited US defence system.

President Bill Clinton may approve next summer, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Wednesday, reports AP.

The system, already being tested, is designed to protect against North Korea and other potential attackers whose arsenals are less potent than Russia's.

"The strategic environment has changed greatly in the 27 years since the ABM treaty was signed," she said.

Albright also labelled as dangerous extremists.

"A Russian defence official recently proclaimed that his nation has the ability to overwhelm the missile defence system we are planning," Albright said. "That is true — and part of our point."

The treaty, a landmark in arms control, is based on the theory that a defenceless poten-

