

Over 500 insurgents

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heart of the Iraqi capital also wounded at least 20, a police source said.

A Reuters reporter saw four bodies in burned-out cars after the blast near a police patrol in a busy street just off Nasr Square. The bomb devastated a nearby building and littered the street with twisted metal and glass from shattered shop windows.

Earlier at least five people were killed and 20 wounded when a car bomb exploded near a police checkpoint in an eastern district of the Iraqi capital late Wednesday, a police chief said.

The attack took place in the Zayyuna district at about 7:00 pm (1600 GMT), the officers said.

Doctors at the nearby Kindi hospital said they received four dead and 21 wounded of whom one died later.

The Falluja assault has provoked an upsurge in violence elsewhere in Iraq, as happened in April during an earlier failed US attempt to subdue the country's most rebellious city.

Marines fired mortar barrages against elusive guerrillas in Falluja's Jolan district as tanks squeezed down alleys to eliminate resistance on the third full day of the offensive.

Impacts from relentless mortar blasts and sporadic artillery fire blanketed parts of the city with black smoke as rebels responded with occasional mortar rounds and sniper fire.

US officers said Marine Corps and army units had gained a large presence throughout Falluja but were still taking some fire from Saddam Hussein loyalists and foreign militants.

Tanks punched through Jolan to the Euphrates river and were chasing down remaining rebels to consolidate control over the city 32 miles west of Baghdad.

"Things are going, I think, as planned. We've got about 70 percent of the city under control," US General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told CBS television.

"There have been hundreds and hundreds of insurgents who have been either killed or captured," he said.

But while US-led troops fought for the upper hand in Falluja, insurgents in the northern city of Mosul set police stations ablaze, stole weapons and roamed the streets.

Residents said Iraq's third largest city seemed to slide out of control as grenade blasts and gunfire rang through empty streets and smoke billowed from two burning police stations.

Rebels attacked Iraqi national guards controlling a bridge in the city center, killing five of them, witnesses said.

A cameraman for Reuters filmed

3-day mourning

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Leader of the Opposition and President of Awami League Sheikh Hasina in her message expressed deep grief at the death of Arafat and said his sacrifice, struggle and courage for the cause of Palestinian autonomy would always be etched on history.

Remembering Arafat's active support during the Liberation War in 1971 and his close friendship with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hasina said Arafat's death has meant for Bangladesh loss of a true friend and for her, loss of a guardian.

Former diplomats and opposition leaders, who witnessed at close quarters Arafat's rapport with Bangladeshi leaders since 1971, said that although Arafat's death marks an end of an era, Bangladesh will not and should not cease supporting the Palestinian struggle for independent statehood.

Palestinian Ambassador in Dhaka Shahta Zarab said that Arafat had a special place in his heart for Bangladesh and its people and whenever he travelled to anywhere in Asia he tried to make a stopover in Bangladesh.

Former diplomat MM Rezaul Karim told The Daily Star last night that the lasting relationship between Arafat and all the leaders of Bangladesh since 1971 was in fact a symbol of solidarity and friendship between the peoples of Palestine and Bangladesh.

Mohammad Zamir, a former ambassador, who met Arafat over 150 times, told The Daily Star that Bangladesh foreign ministry and its permanent representative in the United Nations in New York should initiate steps to push for holding a free and fair election in Palestine, especially in the Israeli-occupied cities and towns in the West Bank.

The Palestinian embassy in Dhaka yesterday opened a book of condolence. President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday signed the book before leaving for Cairo.

Besides hundreds of Dhaka residents who flocked to the embassy throughout the day, Speaker Zahiruddin Sirar, BNP Secretary General and Local Government and Rural Development Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil and numerous foreign envoys to Dhaka wrote their messages of condolence in the book.

Meanwhile, hundreds of political and civil society organisations yesterday issued messages of condolence. They said death of Arafat is a great loss to the oppressed of the world.

Council of Returned Freedom Fighters from Palestine, a group of over 5,000 Bangladeshis, who went to South Lebanon in the 1980s to fight for the Palestinians, in a press release yesterday grieved the death of Arafat.

gunmen raiding weapons and flak jackets from a police station before setting it on fire.

"It's crazy, really, really crazy," said Abdullah Fathi, a resident who witnessed the police station attack.

A photographer working for Reuters was shot in the leg and taken to hospital. Doctors said one civilian had been killed and at least 25 wounded in the past two days of fighting.

Violence has worsened in Mosul, a strongly nationalist city of three million people, over the past year, but residents said the chaos of the past two days had broken new ground.

"Yesterday, the city felt like hell, today it could be the same or worse," Fathi said.

Apparently responding to the Falluja offensive, insurgents have staged attacks this week in the Sunni towns and cities of Samarra, Baiji, Baquba, Tikrit, Ramadi and parts of Baghdad.

Six national guards were killed near Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, by a roadside bomb on Wednesday night, witnesses said.

Kirkuk's provincial governor escaped unhurt when a car bomb blew up near his convoy in the northern city, wounding 16 people, police and hospital officials said.

In Falluja, residents said the stench of decomposing bodies hung over the battered city, power and water supplies had been cut for five days and food was running out for thousands of civilians trapped in their homes by the fighting.

Interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, who ordered the assault, has come under personal pressure from Islamist militants who kidnapped three of his relatives on Tuesday.

The militants have threatened to behead Allawi's 75-year-old cousin Ghazi and two women relatives unless he calls off the assault. The government has said its policy will not change.

The Iraqi military governor in Falluja said his men had found "slaughterhouses" where militants had held and killed hostages, along with records of victims.

But Major-General Abdul-Qader Jassim told reporters he could not say if the evidence offered any clues to the fate of at least nine foreign hostages still missing.

Allawi and his US backers have vowed to pacify Falluja and the rest of the country before elections due in January.

Shahriar Kabir

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and Rangpur combined military hospitals (CMHs), they were admitted to Rangpur Medical College and Hospital (RMCH) and a private clinic.

The Nimul Committee leaders were scheduled to attend a programme in Thakurgaon at 6:00pm yesterday.

The driver of the vehicle lost control on the wheel when a rear tyre burst near Wapda on Saidpur bypass at 1:50pm, witnesses said.

The vehicle careered across the road and fell into a paddy field when the driver tried to avoid head-on collision with a motorcycle, they added.

The occupants of the microbus suffered severe injuries to their head, chest and face as the vehicle was completely wrecked.

After Piyal died at Saidpur hospital, the other wounded were rushed to the CMHs in Saidpur and Rangpur where authorities refused to admit them.

They were later admitted to Lifeline Community Hospital, a private clinic in Rangpur, from where Miju and Apu were shifted to the RMCH as their condition deteriorated. Miju and Apu did not regain consciousness, said RMCH doctors at 7:30 last night.

Shahriar sustained right-leg fracture and injuries to his head and Mukul to his whole body.

Judicial Service

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government will have to put in place relevant rules and regulations to make it effective.

Since 1999 when the Supreme Court declared appointment of judges through the PSC illegal, there had been no appointment of new judges to the lower court. The court had directed the government to form the Judicial Service and make all new appointments through a Judicial Service Commission instead of the PSC.

The government formed the seven-member Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission on February 25 led by Appellate Division Judge MM Ruhul Amin. Now with the new Judicial Service, the Commission will be able to make new appointments.

The Judicial Service Commission will begin the process of appointment of judges in the lower judiciary by placing advertisements in newspapers.

The commission already recommended appointment of 50 assistant judges who were selected by the PSC through the 22nd Bangladesh Civil Service examinations.

About 200 vacancies are there in the lower judiciary.

The remaining three sets of rules and the amendment to the CrPC are still at draft stage, law ministry sources said. The three rules are the Bangladesh Judicial Service (Constitution, Recruitment, Suspension, Dismissal and Removal) Rules, the Bangladesh Judicial Service (Posting, Promotion, Leave, Control, Discipline and other Service Conditions) Rules, and the Bangladesh Judicial Service (Pay Commission) Rules.

Arafat's funeral

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send deputy prime minister Hui Liangyu and Malaysia will be represented by Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

But the foreign ministers of seven European Union states, as well as Switzerland and Turkey, have already announced their presence in the Egyptian capital, while neither Russia nor the United States has decided who will represent them.

The Dutch foreign minister will also represent the European Union as the Netherlands currently holds the rotating presidency of the EU.

French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier and his British and German counterparts Jack Straw and Joschka Fischer, who have all been involved to a greater or lesser degree in Middle East diplomacy, have made it known they will attend, as have Ireland's Dermot Ahern and Per Stig Moller of Denmark, along with Miguel Angel Moratinos of Spain, Switzerland's Micheline Calmy-Rey and Abdullah Gul of Turkey, who made it clear that other Turkish leaders were likely to join him.

United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan is also expected to attend.

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Last-minute Eid

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daughter with Tk 130 yesterday just before starting for his home at Bhairab.

People especially those in the middle and lower income brackets are swarming Gausia and New Market. Shoppers struggled to enter the markets. But shopkeepers in both the markets said sale so far was much lower than expected. They blamed it on the recent floods and mushrooming shopping complexes in the city.

"Last year in Ramadan we sold sarees over Tk 2 lakh, whereas this year it hasn't yet passed Tk 60 thousand mark," a salesman of New Market said.

"This year price of dress is comparatively higher. Moreover, I hardly found much variety in designs of dresses and shoes in Eastern Plaza, Concord Arcadia and even in New Market," said Mita, a young lady.

Like many others, Mita and her friends had to rummage through different shopping centres throughout the Ramadan this year for reasonable price and quality.

Bashundhara City, the latest addition to the city shopping malls, has enjoyed a steady stream of shoppers since its opening. The salesmen in the complex said sale so far has met the expectations. But shopkeepers in the other markets said most people go to Bashundhara City merely for a visit.

Many of the shoppers in Bashundhara City complained of unreasonable price. The same dress that costs Tk 2000 at Karnaphuli Garden City or Eastern Plaza, costs Tk 3200 here, they alleged. Still shoppers from upper and upper middle class relished the presence of exclusive items, in particular the globally adored brand names, at Bashundhara City, said a shopkeeper.

Though many are grappling with the rising prices, massive presence of shoppers was seen in almost all the malls from Uttara to Banga Bazar.

Abbas PLO chief

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minister Mahmoud Abbas, who favors an end to violence and renewed peacemaking with Israel, was earlier elected chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Palestinians' highest decision-making body.

Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, another moderate, is expected to have greater sway over security bodies than he held under Arafat, charismatic founder of the Palestinian national cause who held all reins of power.

In another succession move, Farouk Kaddoumi, a hard-liner who advocates continued armed struggle against Israel for Palestinian statehood, was elected head of the PLO's main political movement, Fatah.

Some fear Arafat's departure will leave a chaotic void in which Palestinian factions will jockey for power.

Arafat was declared dead in a French hospital on Thursday at the age of 75.

AFP adds: Better known by his nom-de-guerre Abu Mazen, a name taken from his dead first-born son, Abbas quit as Arafat's first-ever premier in September 2003.

After barely four months in the job, he walked out after failing to wrest full control of the Palestinian security apparatus from the former strongman.

A Washington favourite, Abbas held talks with President George W. Bush, who cold-shouldered Arafat, in the White House in July 2003.

Last year, he led the Palestinian delegation at a summit in Jordan to launch the roadmap peace plan, where he pledged to "resort to peaceful means in our quest to end the occupation".

An outspoken critic of the "militarisation" of the Palestinian uprising, Abbas managed to persuade armed factions such as Hamas to call a truce in their campaign of attacks against Israel in July 2003.

Yasser Arafat dies

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into the streets, clutching his photograph, crying and wondering about their future without the man who embodied their struggle for statehood.

"He is our father," Namia Abu-Safia, 48, said sobbing in the Jebaliya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. "He is Palestine."

Black smoke from burning tyres rose across the Gaza Strip, gunmen fired into the air in grief. Palestinian flags at Arafat's battered compound were lowered to half-mast. Sombre music played on the radio, church bells rang out, and Quranic verses were played for hours over mosque loudspeakers.

Fearing the mourning could rapidly turn into rioting, Israel quickly sealed the West Bank and Gaza Strip and increased security at Jewish settlements.

The death of Arafat, who ruled firmly over squabbling Palestinian factions for four decades, left Palestinians without a strong leader for the first time. It raised concern that the scramble to claim Arafat's mantle could fragment the Palestinian leadership or spark chaos and factional fighting in the streets.

In a hurried effort to project continuity, the PLO elected former Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas as its new chief, virtually ensuring that he will succeed Arafat as leader of the Palestinians, at least in the short term.

The Palestinian legislature also swore in Parliament Speaker Rauhi Fattouh as caretaker president of the Palestinian Authority until elections can be held in 60 days, according to Palestinian law.

President Bush said the passing of Arafat was a "significant moment" in Palestinian history and expressed hope that Palestinians would achieve statehood and peace with Israel.

Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian foreign minister, called on Israel to resume implementation of the US-backed "road map" peace plan. He told The Associated Press that Israel had used its dislike for Arafat as an excuse for avoiding obligations to withdraw from West Bank towns.

"Now, the road is open, and we are telling the Israelis, welcome. If you want to implement the road map, then implement it," Shaath said. "It was the path of President Arafat, and we will go on the path of Arafat."

French President Jacques Chirac eulogized Arafat as a "man of courage and conviction who, for 40 years, has been the incarnation of the Palestinians' combat for recognition of their national rights."

Arafat was flown to a French military hospital in Clamart, outside of Paris, on Oct. 29 after his health began deteriorating last month. It was the first time in nearly three years that he left his compound in Ramallah, where he was held a virtual prisoner by Israel.

Palestinian officials initially insisted he had a lingering case of the flu, but they grew increasingly concerned when he did not recover. Neither his doctors nor Palestinian leaders would say what killed him.

The Israeli military, meanwhile, said it would restrict access to the burial, allowing only Palestinians with permits to attend, but would allow mourners to hold processions in towns and refugee camps.

As much as his life was filled with controversy, so too was

Arafat's death.

The Palestinians had demanded Arafat be buried in Jerusalem on the disputed holy site that once held the biblical Jewish temples and now the Al Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine.

Israel refused, fearing a Jerusalem burial would strengthen Palestinians' claims to a city they envision as a capital of a future Palestinian state.

In a compromise, the Palestinians agreed to bury him at his compound in Ramallah, battered and strewn with rubble from repeated Israeli raids. But they plan to line his grave with soil taken from the Al Aqsa Mosque compound, said Ahmed Ghneim, a Fatah leader, and he is to be interred in a cement box, so he can be moved to Jerusalem for burial when the opportunity presents itself.

Seldom in public without his military uniform and his checkered keffiyeh headress, Arafat kept the Palestinians' cause at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But he fell short of creating a Palestinian state, and, along with other secular Arab leaders of his generation, he saw his influence weakened by the rise of radical Islam in recent years.

Arafat became one of the world's most familiar faces after addressing the UN General Assembly in New York in 1974, when he entered the chamber wearing a holster and carrying a twig. "Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun," he said. "Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand."

Two decades later, he shook hands at the White House with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on a peace deal that formally recognised Israel's right to exist while granting the Palestinians limited self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The pact led to the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize for Arafat, Rabin and then-Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

But the accord quickly unraveled amid mutual suspicions and accusations of treaty violations. A new round of violence that erupted in the fall of 2000 has killed some 4,000 people, three-quarters of them Palestinians.

"The biggest mistake of Arafat was when he turned to terror. His greatest achievements were when he tried to build peace," Peres said.

A resilient survivor of war with Israel, assassination attempts -- even a plane crash, Arafat was born Rahman Abdel-Raouf Arafat Al-Qudwa on August 4, 1929, the fifth of seven children of a Palestinian merchant killed in the 1948 war over Israel's creation. There is disagreement whether he was born in Gaza or in Cairo.

Educated as an engineer in Egypt, Arafat served in the Egyptian army and then started a construction firm in Kuwait. It was there that he founded the Fatah movement, which became the core of the PLO. After the Arabs' humbling defeat by Israel in the six-day war of 1967, the PLO thrust itself on the world's front pages by sending its gunmen out to hijack airplanes, machine gun airports and kill Israeli athletes at the 1972 Summer Olympics.

"As long as the world saw Palestinians as no more than refugees standing in line for UN rations, it was not likely to respect them. Now that the Palestinians carry rifles the situation has changed," Arafat explained.

(AP/AFP/Reuters)

Babar asks Rab

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during the drive, and most of them were linked with the ruling party. But "our government treats terrorists as terrorists", nothing else like previous Awami League government that had resorted to creating a "reign of terror across the country through patronising the terrorists".

As the local leaders and BNP lawmakers said that Narayanjan got a stigma as a terror-infested area during the previous Awami League rule, the minister said, "We want to make the industrial town into a model city."

"So work in line with this direction and I want to get the improvement report after a month," he ordered the law enforcers, taking a tough stance.

The minister, who also inspected a phensidyl-demolition programme, also asked the law enforcers to declare "war on drugs" in Narayanjan.

More than 38 thousand bottles of drugs were demolished near the venue.

Among others, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim, Giasuddin Ahmed MP and advocate Abul Kalam Azad MP spoke on the occasion.

Later, Babar visited some shopping malls and talked to shopkeepers and buyers about extortion. They informed the minister that due to Rab operation, the situation is gradually improving.

Babar also said the government is ready to take silent action against "silent extortion", a complaint received from many places.

"Inform us about silent extortion wherever it happens we will take action against 'silent extortion' without disclosing the names of the concerned," he said.

Mahathir

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Mahathir will lead a 40-member business team to the 'Bangladesh-Malaysia Business Forum 2004', the first of its kind, to be held on December 18 at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel aimed at boosting bi-lateral trade, investment and tourism.

He will present the keynote paper on 'Malaysia 2020 -- from Vision to Reality' at the inaugural session of the forum being organised by Bangladesh-Malaysia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BMCCI).

Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad was born in Alor Star, Kedah, on December 20, 1925. He has been active in politics since 1945 and a member of United Malays National Organisation since its inception in 1946.

Dr Mahathir was the prime minister of Malaysia from July 16, 1981 to 2003. Under his leadership, the ruling Barisan Nasional (national front) won landslide victories in the 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995 and 1999 general elections.

City starts

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leaving the terminal overloaded with passengers.

Launch staff continued such malpractice in presence of the law enforcers.

Asked about overloading, some patrol police said it was not their concern.

"It is very hard to control the situation as thousands of people have become desperate to board the launches to reach their village homes," said Abdur Rahim Bhuiyan, Magistrate of the Marine Court.

Many passengers got into the launches reaching them by boats, avoiding the terminal passage, he added.

Launch cabins were available but unscrupulous staff were selling tickets under the counter at much higher rates.

Lower income people had to pay brokers about Tk 100 in extra fare to find a place on the decks of launches.

The magistrate however said passengers did not file any such complaint to them.

Trader gunned

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victim's younger brother, told The Daily Star. "Spraying bullets on him the killers fled the scene."

Hearing Kalam's scream, his family members came out of house and found him lying unconscious in a pool of blood.

The businessman who received three bullets, two in his chest and one in shoulder, died on way to the DMCH. Doctors confirmed his death on arrival at the hospital at 12:30am.

Salam said in the first information report (FIR) that his brother had rivalry with some businessmen and he might have been killed for this.

Kalam had three cargo ships running between Dhaka and Chittagong and a motor parts shop. He was also involved in fuel business in Waizghat.

In Mirpur, locals caught Anwar Hossain, 19, and his friend Arman when they were moving suspiciously in North Pirebagh area at around 9:30pm Wednesday night.

The mob beat them mercilessly and handed them over to the police along with a revolver, two bullets and a knife seized from their possession.

The police admitted them to the DMCH where Anwar died at around 3:30am yesterday. Arman has been admitted at Orthopaedics Hospital.

Meanwhile, construction worker Abdus Salam, 42, who received a bullet in his throat on November 2 when a gang of robbers fired indiscriminately while fleeing after looting a house in Char Waspur in Basila, died at the DMCH yesterday.

Gas, fuel oil

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put in place a pricing formula for the energy and power tariffs following discussions with the World Bank, under which prices are adjusted every six months on review of the domestic and international markets. The power tariff was reviewed in September but there had been no increase in the prices.

The government has been under intense pressure from donors to hike the fuel oil and gas prices since those had not been adjusted in line with the pricing formula. The IMF mission had also asked for a rise in the oil and gas prices.

Accordingly, the IMF pushed the inflation rate target up to 6.8 percent for this fiscal year from an earlier projection of 5.5 percent on the grounds that inflation will escalate on the back of a rise in the oil prices scheduled for January, sources said.

The last review in April-May called for a 5.77 percent increase in the gas prices and a hike by 3.5 percent took effect in July last year. Sources said another hike of 2.2 percent may take place in January, which may see monthly charges for non-metered single-burner and double-burner at Tk 340 and Tk 390.

The government also informed donors that prices will be reviewed monthly in line with the formula agreed with the World Bank, so that if the variation is greater than 10 percent prices will be immediately

adjusted, sources said. Otherwise, they will be adjusted on April 1 and October 1 in accordance with the formula, they added.

Donors argued that kerosene and jet fuel prices were upped in May, but implementation of the pricing framework has been partial. Besides, prices of other petroleum products have not been adjusted since January last year, although international prices saw a sharp rise.

The prices of diesel and kerosene are now equivalent to Tk 30 a litre in India after the prices were adjusted a few days back, while in Bangladesh they cost Tk 20 a litre.

The donors warned that not only will the state-run Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation run the risk of counting losses because of the low prices on the domestic market compared to India's, valuable foreign currencies may also be smuggled out of the country.

Official sources said the government will review the fuel oil prices next month before deciding about whether to go for a hike.

"We were not affected that much by the recent rise in the oil prices because we had bought fuel oil beforehand. We will mount watch on the border to check cross-border smuggling but we do not want to make the farmers suffer by raising oil prices. It is the farmers who lead our economy," State Minister Mosharraf said.

World leaders

FROM PAGE 1
Arafat, 75, died in a French military hospital close to Paris after being airlifted there from his Ramallah headquarters on October 29. He had been in a coma since the middle of last week.

"For the Palestinian people, we hope that the future will bring peace and the fulfillment of their aspirations for an independent, democratic Palestine that is at peace with its neighbors," Bush said.

While he is the first US president to formally endorse the creation of an independent Palestinian state, Bush had always made it clear that he regarded Arafat as a "failed" leader.

Bush's predecessor Bill Clinton, who engineered the historic handshake on the White House lawn as Arafat and then Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin signed the 1993 Oslo peace accords, expressed condolences tinged with regret.

He said