



Israeli deaths halt latest peace talks

BY MARK LAVIE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — Israel recalled its delegation to peace talks with the Palestinians on Tuesday, the prime minister's office said, after two Israelis were killed, apparently by Palestinian gunmen.

The recall came on the third day of talks between Israeli and Palestinian teams in Taba, Egypt. The negotiators were attempting to reach an agreement that would lead to the end of more than a half-century of Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Late in the day, word came that the bodies of two Israelis had been discovered in the West Bank, near Tulkarem. Palestinian officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the two were abducted and killed.

Police and army officials said the two Israelis were restaurant owners from the Tel Aviv area. They were taken to the West Bank by an Israeli Arab, the officials said.

The men were abducted by armed men and killed in the West Bank, the Palestinian official said. Israel radio said the bodies were found near the Nur Shams Palestinian refugee camp next to Tulkarem. Their bodies were turned over to the Israeli military.

The Israeli negotiating team was recalled to Jerusalem for consultations, according to a statement from Prime Minister Ehud Barak's office. It was not clear when or if the talks with the Palestinians in the Egyptian resort of Taba, just across the Israeli border, would resume.

Barak's office said he "ordered Israeli government ministers in Taba to return immediately for consultations in Jerusalem. During the consultations there will be no talks at any level."

In the past, Israel has suspended peace negotiations in reaction to such killings. Peace contacts were suspended for one day after an Israeli youth was shot to death in the West Bank. He was allegedly lured there by a Palestinian woman with whom he communicated on the Internet.

Tuesday's breakdown came after negotiators on both sides had described a positive atmosphere at the talks.

Barak, speaking to high school students in Tel Aviv before news of the killings broke, offered ideas on how the two sides might share Jerusalem, including the walled Old City — one of the thorniest unresolved issues.



College Press Exchange

Masked Palestinian demonstrators burn an effigy of Canadian Foreign Minister John Manley during a rally in the West Bank this past Monday. The demonstrators were reacting to an interview in which Manley said Canada has offered to accept Palestinian refugees as part of the most recent Middle East peace plan.

"The special character of the city must be preserved, a way must be found so that the practical conduct of everyday life in Jerusalem will indeed be joint management in the Old City," Barak said.

But with an eye on Israeli elections only two weeks away, Barak also emphasized that he would keep Judaism's holiest sites, such as the Western Wall, under full Israeli sovereignty.

Barak's critics have accused him of offering too many concessions, but his comments Tuesday immediately drew criticism from the Palestinians.

Israel currently claims sovereignty

over all of Jerusalem, while the Palestinians want the capital of their future state in traditionally Arab east Jerusalem, which includes the Old City.

"We will not back down from our legitimate demands, whether we negotiate with Barak's government or any other government," said Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Arafat was referring to Barak's hard-line rival for prime minister, Ariel Sharon, who leads by nearly 20 percentage points in opinion polls. Sharon opposes far-reaching concessions and says he won't recognize agreements reached in the days before the election.

Fear of racial tension rises in Malaysia

BY SEAN YOUNG
ASSOCIATED PRESS

GEORGETOWN, Malaysia — Drums and cymbals crash ferociously as hundreds of spectators cheer a troupe of youngsters capering with a cloth dragon 30 feet long. The Year of the Snake is at hand, but the festivities mask a troubled time for Malaysia's ethnic Chinese minority.

"For the first time, I'm relieved that the Year of the Dragon is over," said Tan Swee Chee, a second-generation Malaysian of Chinese origin at a street party ahead of Chinese New Year celebrations on Wednesday.

"It was supposed to bring us prosperity and happiness, but we seem to be worse off now."

Relations with the Malay Muslim majority have grown tense in recent months, with many Chinese believing that Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is playing a dangerous race card.

Racial tensions often end in violence in Southeast Asia.

In Indonesia, ethnic Chinese were raped and killed in riots that accompanied the fall of dictator Suharto in 1998.

Singapore, the region's only Chinese-majority country, is sensitive to anti-Chinese sentiments. "Recent events at home and in the region have brought out starkly the importance of constantly tending our harmonious race relations," said Goh Chok Tong, Singapore's prime minister, in his Chinese New Year's message.

In Malaysia, which is next to Singapore, race is the backdrop to all politics. Every government since independence from Britain in 1957 has been led by the United Malays National Organization, the exclusively Malay party. Chinese and Indian-based parties have minor roles in government, but UMNO under Mahathir takes the lead.

In 1969, ethnic riots fueled by Malay resentment of Chinese dominance in the economy left hundreds dead. Malaysia then instituted a brand of affirmative action that guarantees Malays cheap

loans, places in universities and government jobs.

Many Chinese dislike the policy, but grudgingly accept it as necessary to keep racial tensions from boiling over. "As a multiracial country, we must accept that no one race will receive everything it wants," says Housing Minister Ong Ka Ting, who is Chinese.

Georgetown is the capital of the northern island of Penang, Malaysia's only Chinese-majority state. Here, where conversations are usually about weddings and the weather, the talk has lately turned resentful.

Chinese are 30 percent of the population of 22 million, and their vote was crucial in returning Mahathir to power in a 1999 general election, when his Malay power base was split.

But since then, Malaysia's Muslim ruler of 19 years has repeatedly upset many Chinese with comments and decisions they feel are designed to regain Malay favor.

Just before the election, a Chinese group called for ending the affirmative-action policies, saying they were unfair and holding back the country.

The call stirred little reaction at the time. But a few months ago, Mahathir belatedly condemned it as "extremist." A Malay student group threatened a holy war to defend affirmative action, and the Chinese backed off.

Now Mahathir is pressuring the Chinese to accept racially integrated schools, putting hitherto separate Malay, Chinese and Indian schools under one roof. Chinese fear the teaching of their language and history will suffer.

"We don't want an angry confrontation with the Malays because we know that racial harmony is the key to our country's peace and success," said Khoo Huck Cheong, a tourist guide. "But nowadays we feel as though we're being treated as second-class citizens."

"Now, from a very harmonious society, we have a very contentious society," Mahathir admitted recently. "I do hope in the year 2001, people will return to their senses and revive the trend of racial harmony."

WORLD BRIEFS

■ Bush to launch education plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Bush, trying to attract Democrats to his education program without abandoning school vouchers, is proposing new money for the nation's public systems while offering to give lagging schools more chances to shape up before they would lose federal funds to private institutions.

The president, who made education a cornerstone of his campaign isn't backing off vouchers, the most divisive part of his education agenda, when he unveiled the plan Tuesday in a Rose Garden ceremony.

■ California braces for more blackouts

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Northern California braced for another round of rolling blackouts Tuesday as the state's power managers desperately scrounged the market for electricity.

California lost the ability to save as much as 300 megawatts — enough to illuminate 300,000 homes — Monday night when Pacific Gas & Electric reached the annual limit it can shut off power to its interruptible contract customers.

Those customers had agreed to accept outages during times of tight supply in exchange for lower rates. But with those customers shut down for several hours daily last week and several hours Monday, PG&E reached the limit of 100 hours.

■ House of Lords approves embryo cloning for research

LONDON (AP) — The House of Lords approved a proposed change to government regulations Monday that makes Britain the first country to effectively legalize the creation of cloned human embryos.

The measure is aimed at allowing research on so-called stem cells — the unprogrammed master cells found in early stage embryos that can turn into nearly every cell type in the body. Like all other embryos used in research, the clones created under the new regulations would have to be destroyed after 14 days, and the creation of babies by cloning would remain outlawed.

The change passed late Monday after an amendment that would have delayed it was defeated.

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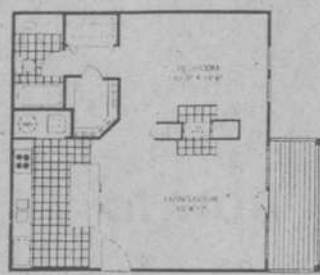
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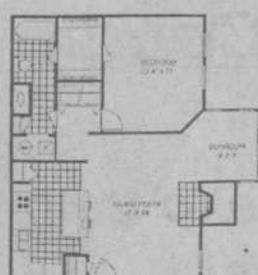
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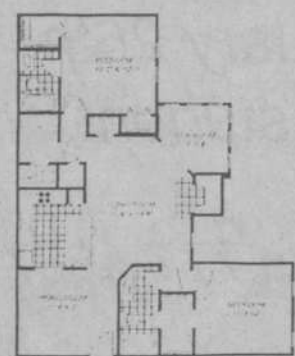


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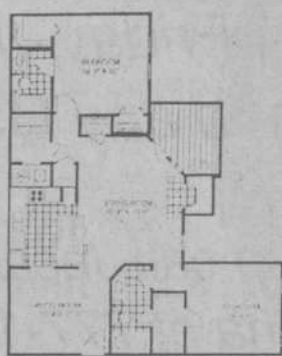
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