

Government aims to segregate Jews and Palestinians

Israel tightens vice on Arab workers

Derek Brown in Jerusalem

ISRAELI police yesterday said they would seek harsh punishment for employers trying to smuggle unlicensed Arab workers from the occupied territories into Israel. The government has also announced a plan to replace 20,000 Arab labourers with unemployed Israelis.

The announcements emphasise the steady movement towards the segregation of Israelis and Palestinians since the prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, announced the closure of the "Green Line" between Israel and the occupied territories last Tuesday.

Israeli citizens, both Jews and Arabs, may still enter the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But Palestinian Arabs from the occupied territories are no longer allowed into Israel. The ban has cut off an estimated 120,000 Arabs from their jobs in Israel, mostly as low-paid manual construction and agricultural labourers.

Mr Rabin closed the border after Palestinian militants killed 13 Israelis in March. Opponents condemned the closure as a collective punishment for the territories' nearly 2 million Palestinians.

Hanan Ashrawi, spokeswoman of the Palestinian team at the stalled Middle East peace talks, said the West Bank and Gaza had been turned into a

"massive collective prison". The ban was a further blow to the peace process, she said.

Other observers see the closure as a decisive shift in policy which aims to restore the Green Line, although not necessarily along the exact boundaries which existed before the 1967 Middle East war.

Although the ban is widely expected to be relaxed after the eight-day Passover festival, which began last night, the government has indicated a long-term goal of physically separating Israelis and Palestinians. It has announced:

- A subsidy of up to 40 shekels (about £10) a day for Israeli workers who take the places of Arab farm labourers.
- The deployment of several hundred soldiers to help farmers with urgent harvests.
- The possibility, being considered by the ministry of defence, that conscripts who want to receive training in the construction industry are discharged early.
- Extending visas for some of the thousands of Thai farm labourers who work for little more than four shekels (£1) an hour, well under the rate demanded by Israelis.

The last move is unlikely to lead to a large-scale influx of Thai and other cheap labour. Instead, the minister of labour and social affairs, Ora Namir, hopes to encourage employers to take on some of the 150,000 unemployed Israelis.

The government has also stressed that if the closure is lifted, the permit system allowing Arabs to enter Israel will be rigorously enforced. Permit-holders must carry proof of identity and a machine-readable card. It is estimated that, before the ban, the 68,000 authorised workers from the territories may have been only half the total which crossed each day to find work. Others have been illegally housed within Israel by employers anxious to retain cheap labour.

Police and troops, meanwhile, have stepped up patrols and reinforced guard posts to deter militant attacks during Passover.

The holiday has brought no respite in the diplomatic activity surrounding the planned resumption of the Middle East peace talks in Washington on April 20. So far, only Israel has accepted the joint invitation from the United States and Russia. The Palestinians say they will boycott the talks unless Israel makes further concessions to the 396 alleged fundamentalist extremists it deported last December, and who are still encamped on a hillside in South Lebanon. Arab countries have not decided whether to attend.

The latest whiff of compromise came as President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, in Washington for talks with President Clinton, indicated that he was eager to meet Mr Rabin next week after Passover.

Indonesians look urgently to life after Suharto

After 25 years of the president's rule, groups are jockeying for power in the succession game, writes Philip Bowling, recently in Jakarta

INDONESIA is beginning to look towards the post-Suharto era. But it is unclear whether President Suharto is doing the same. Twenty-five years in power and newly elected by the consultative assembly for another five-year term, he is still difficult to read.

For those looking beyond a leader who will be aged 72 this summer, attention centres on the new vice-presidents chosen by the assembly, General Try Sutrisno, aged 57, who recently retired as military chief.

It is unclear how far he was the president's choice, and it remains to be seen if the head of state will delegate power to him. Vice-presidents have not counted for much under President Suharto, who is preoccupied with lobbying members of the Group of Seven (G7) richest industrial countries to be allowed to attend their summit in Tokyo in July to present the views of developing nations.

The succession issue is a game with many players. First, there are the armed forces, which retain a strong belief in their role as the national guardian of a unitary and non-sectarian state. But they have problems translating that conviction into a more precise role in a fast-changing and increasingly complex society.

The military is worried that President Suharto's flirtation with Muslim political forces — itself a reaction to implicit criticism by the military — could be divisive. It is concerned, too, that the president's failure to prepare his succession could be a threat to national stability. But the military has an innate loyalty to the president, and is weakened by internal rivalries.

Then there are the Muslims.

The country is experiencing a rise in Islamic consciousness. ICM, a group of Islamic intellectuals clustered around the ambitious and charismatic technology minister, B. J. Habibie, could become a political force, although it is seen by many as a creation by the president to allow Muslims to let off steam. Nonetheless, there are more radical elements in the wings of this and other Islamic movements, which could feed on popular frustrations.

The most virulent aspect of the Islamic revival has been reflected in the burning of Christian churches in east Java. Some see this as aimed against Indonesia's Chinese, many of whom are Christians.

East Timor rebel leader 'captured'

INDONESIA'S military said yesterday it had captured the East Timor rebel leader, Antonio Gomes da Costa, in another blow to the separatist guerrilla movement.

A military official said Mr Da Costa was caught in a weekend raid on Anarou village, about 30 miles south of the capital, Dili.

Known by his *nom de guerre*, Mathunu, Mr Da Costa took over the Fretilin leadership from Xanana Gusmao, who was arrested last November, and is on trial.

The capture was announced as Amos Wako, the envoy of the United Nations secretary-general, arrived for a fact-finding mission on the army massacre of mourners at a funeral in Dili in November 1991. — Reuter.

At the grassroots, Islam is still primarily represented by the traditionalist but pragmatic Nahdlatul Islam, which supports *pancasila*, Indonesia's woolly but tolerant state philosophy, over sectarianism.

The future role of Golkar, the ruling party, is uncertain. Although seen as President Suharto's creature, it has grassroots support. The dilemma for the army and for Muslim groups is whether to try to dominate Golkar or promote one or both of the two tolerated "opposition" parties. Any development of parliament's powers is likely to be slow.

Many feel that political change is needed if frustrations are not to grow. Anti-Chinese sentiment has risen sharply since the especially rapid growth of Chinese business groups after financial liberalisation in the late 1980s. It has been further fuelled by the enthusiasm of the Indonesian Chinese for investing in China.

Anti-Chinese sentiment is a symptom, too, of unease about wealth distribution which often focuses on the acquisitiveness of President Suharto's children. This angers those who believe in equality, indigenous businessmen who miss out on the spoils, and opponents of the monopolies which still control large parts of the economy.

The necessity for a transition may be a presidential blind spot. President Suharto may try to manage the succession or, like a Javanese king, he may see himself as the embodiment of the state, to be ousted from his position only by death.

● Britain agreed yesterday to grant Indonesia \$65 million in aid to help finance a power project in eastern Kalimantan, on the island of Borneo.

The concessional loan, which is tied to the involvement of British companies, was signed in Jakarta by the visiting Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, and the Indonesian foreign minister, Ali Alatas.



Forced out... An elderly Azeri flees the village of Kelbadzhar, which Armenian forces captured at the weekend

Fleeing Azeris in trek ordeal

Reuter in Khanlar

AZERI refugees fleeing the war zone are pouring into this settlement in northern Azerbaijan, ragged, starving and frozen after a hazardous trek across snowbound mountains.

They arrive at a rate of up to 900 a day after a 50-mile journey through a wilderness in the lower Caucasus.

They are fleeing an Armenian offensive in the west of Azerbaijan which has intensified the five-year battle over Nagorno-Karabakh. In all, almost 2,500 people have died in the dispute.

Armenian forces seized the western town of Kelbadzhar and a broad swath of territory adjoining Karabakh on Saturday, trapping tens of thousands of civilians, Azeri authorities say.

The march across the mountains has killed many refugees, according to survivors. They had to leave the bodies high in the mountain passes, somewhere between the Azeri and Armenian positions.

Many who arrive in the Khanlar refugee centre feebly drive sheep, goats and other livestock ahead of them. After having been driven out of their homes by fighting in the Kelbadzhar region to the south, these are virtually their only possessions.

"We've been walking for five days without food. If it had not been for the Red Crescent that gave us food and water, we would have died," one herdsman, Mazem, said.

The most gruelling part is an eight-hour hike through a dangerous pass in the Murovdag mountain range, at a height of 12,000ft. Temperatures are down to minus 10 degrees Celsius (14 degrees Fahrenheit), and the snow is thick.

Mazem said at least 30 refugees died on the march. Armenian soldiers collected many of the bodies. The refugees said many more people could be trapped between Armenian and Azeri units.

● Turkey has halted all Armenia-bound flights through its airspace, the state minister, Akin Gonen, said yesterday.

Ankara, siding with Azerbaijan, stopped European aid to Armenia through its territory at the weekend.

Time and diligent research scrape the Teflon off Ronald Reagan's presidency

Harold Jackson looks at the consequences for America and the rest of the world of ignorance and criminality inspired by ideology

STEP by step the full material and moral cost of the Reagan presidency is reaching the records. The latest chapter comes with the confirmation by a United Nations panel of his administration's disingenuous role in El Salvador.

It was always clear that Mr Reagan and his senior staff consistently preferred ideology to reality. Thinking the right thought far outweighed competence and probity as a qualification for office.

More of Mr Reagan's appointees were disgraced or convicted than in any other administration this century. By the time his second term ended in 1989, 225 of his staff had been accused of ethical transgressions or criminality. Special counsel had to be appointed on six occasions to investigate the more serious allegations.

Among the senior officials forced to resign were the labour secretary, the CIA deputy director, two national security advisers, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, the head of the Federal Aviation Administration and the head of the Veterans Administration. The defence secretary was pardoned by President Bush before he came to trial and the full ramifications of the Iran-contra affair have yet to emerge.

The recent decision by Warren Christopher, the secretary of state, to appoint an independent inquiry into US activities in El Salvador during the Reagan years is only the latest

attempt to disentangle the dismal history of the period. It followed revelations by the UN Truth Committee, which interviewed 2,000 witnesses for its 800-page report into human rights abuses.

The document was immediately discounted by Elliott Abrams, the US official with primary regional responsibility at the time. Mr Abrams declared the well-researched findings a "post-cold war effort to rewrite history". The Reagan administration's Central American record, he said "is one of fabulous achievement".

It depends on the point of view. Among the achievements detailed in the UN report were the torture and massacre in December 1981 of 500 or more villagers by the American-trained Alacati Battalion during a counter-insurgency drive named Operation Rescue.

Within two months of the atrocity Mr Abrams was telling the Senate foreign relations committee that the story was an opposition exaggeration. He demanded that the Senate certify the Salvadorean government's improved human rights record so that it could qualify for further military aid.

Not that the White House or the state department were really ignorant of what was going on. Captured documents in US possession at the time clearly recorded the activities of the military and the death squads. They showed that the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero was arranged by the rightwing leader Roberto d'Au-

buisson, with his associates apparently drawing lots for the privilege of carrying it out.

The US ambassador of the time, Deane Hinton, frustrated at seeing his detailed reports ignored by Washington, went public with his allegation of 30,000 official murders in three years — and was immediately disavowed by the White House.

Time and again Mr Reagan assured Americans they were helping to build democracy in Central America. Meanwhile, his vice-president, George Bush, was secretly handing a



Ronald Reagan: 225 staff accused of transgressions

A million of America's poor were deprived of food stamps and there were cuts in social security, unemployment benefits, and child nutrition.

The evidence continues to mount that Mr Reagan's extreme reluctance to hear the bad news has cost his countrymen dear. On the tenth anniversary of his Strategic Defence Initiative — with \$27 billion so far paid out — there is not a single viable component available for the system.

President Reagan was sold the idea of a Star Wars defence against Soviet missile attack by Edward Teller, the man responsible for the hydrogen bomb. There is no evidence that Mr Teller had ever investigated the feasibility of the scheme and the greater part of America's scientific community was appalled when it was announced. Certainly Mr Reagan himself had no way of assessing it.

When it was first announced, the plan was supposed to render nuclear missiles "impotent and obsolete". The first component, it was claimed, would be in place in the early 1990s. Or recent report by the General Accounting Office, the US budget watchdog, declared flatly that officials involved in the project had repeatedly exaggerated their progress.

Even the army, not renowned for abandoning large-budget projects, became so disillusioned that it cancelled one of the core elements of the project, the tracking system supposed to distinguish real warheads from decoys.

"Tests of another component, the interceptor rockets dubbed Brilliant Pebbles, were officially described as 'a 90 per cent success'. According to the accounting office's investigation, that was only true because

the criteria for the tests were drastically revised.

"Nothing was obtained for one original goal and three other goals were only partially satisfied," it reported.

The accounts said that the director of the programme, Henry Cooper, "twisted the truth to claim successes where none, in fact, existed".

Less clearly documented, but none the less emerging through the murk of Russian history, is Mr Reagan's misjudgment of the superpower relationship and the destructive impact his economic policies are now having on it.

The Soviet Union, he declared, was only interested in world revolution and would "commit any crime, lie, and cheat in order to attain that". He never really shifted from that view, even with the accession of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985.

On the domestic front, meanwhile, his economic mismanagement had transformed America from the world's largest creditor into its largest debtor. When he left office, the US external debt had soared to \$660 billion and was costing \$50 billion a year to service.

This combination of ideological blindness and excessive debt ensured that the US made no economic move to match the successful negotiations with the Soviet Union on the destruction of nuclear weapons. Had the Reagan administration given material backing to Mr Gorbachev's economic reforms of 1987, might they have been saved from their eventual chaos and so ensured a more orderly transition to a market economy?

The Teflon presidency is looking increasingly flaky as history catches up with it.

News in brief

Polish fishermen blockade ports

Polish fishermen blocked all the country's ports yesterday to demand protection for their industry, hit by cheap imports from the former Soviet Union.

They want tax-free fuel, cheap bank credits, import barriers on subsidised foreign products and a longer fishing season for cod. — Reuter.

Mali students riot

Rioting high school students set government buildings ablaze yesterday, accusing President Alpha Oumar Konare of organising a "bogus congress" to oust the head of the students union. — AP.

Late flowering

A Japanese scientist, Hiroshi Utsunomiya, said yesterday he had raised a 7ft white magnolia

Spanish party crisis deepens

THE corruption scandal threatening the future of the Spanish Socialist Party worsened yesterday with the resignation of José María Buegas, third in the party hierarchy, writes Jane Walker in Madrid.

An executive committee meeting on Saturday will decide whether to accept the resignation.

Mr Buegas announced he had sent his letter of resignation as party organisational secretary following growing criticism of the party's financial management by members worried about corruption.

The judicial inquiry into the so-called Fidesa scandal, the use of a puppet company to raise funds illegally for the Socialists, threatens to split the party and could involve a new chain of dismissals and resignations, including perhaps that of the prime minister, Felipe Gonzalez.

Stock market killing

Under a plan put to African tourism ministers at the weekend, shares would be sold in elephants, and shareholders would have the right to shoot them after paying a yearly fee for their upkeep. — Reuter.

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It has brought out into the open four opposing party groups which are fighting to gain supremacy before this autumn's general election, which could end in defeat for the Socialists.

Clinton Pz puts byte into his public dealings

Simon Tisdell in Washington

AMERICANS bothered by taxes and traffic jams, or who just want to say "Hello", can now connect direct to a new White House "computer forum".

The president, whose computer identity is "Clinton Pz", can be electronically mailed by anyone in the US or abroad who has access to on-line computer services. A test by the Guardian yesterday sent the message "Hi

Bill", which elicited the answer "Hi, Guardian!".

Sadly, this was probably not Mr Clinton himself replying, since he was busy yesterday with an old-fashioned, personal interface with the Baltimore Orioles baseball team. But a menu of directories swiftly followed, offering access to presidential speeches, announcements, press briefings, library data and conferencing options.

But there are potential snags. The information which is offered is controlled at source, as in any executive

branch communication with the voters. On the other hand, the system could increase the chances of hacking into the White House and of introducing electronic bugs and viruses.

The American media are worried that they are being bypassed by direct communication between public and president. Some see the "electronic electorate" as a vast new propaganda opportunity for politicians, in which their statements do not face objective scrutiny.

The computer forum is just a beginning. The White House is examining digital photography as a means of downloading Clinton Pz's image as well as his words, and there is talk of a presidential cable television channel.

The computer forum will create a more informed, less alienated electorate, said Jeff Eller of the White House media affairs office. "In the campaign, the president used the term 'to reconnect'. It's wonderfully democratic."