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No cease-fire, 3 wee stalemate continue

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) - The first direct negotiations to end a three-week stalemate between Israeli forces and armed Palestinians holed up in one of Christianity's holiest shrines ended Tuesday without an agreement.

Palestinians were optimistic for a quick resolution. But Bethlehem Mayor Hanna Nasser, who participated in the talks, said the discussions ended without a deal. The two sides are to meet again Wednesday.

"It was important, and we agreed to continue discussions," he said, without saying if progress had been made.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, meanwhile, told an American Jewish group he believed a U.S.-sponsored international peace conference could end Mideast hostilities. He credited the Israeli incursion into the West Bank with creating the climate for a settlement. "Regional peace is within

our grasp," Sharon said. "I am optimistic about the future.

With the Israeli incursion significantly scaled back, gruesome street scenes played out as masked Palestinian militiamen summarily executed fellow Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel. Three men were shot dead in Hebron, and two of the bullet-riddled bodies were strung up by a mob.

The killings were carried out to avenge the Monday night Israeli killing of Marwan Zalloum, commander of the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade in Hebron.

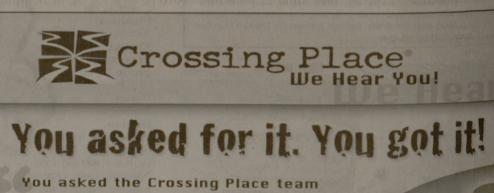
'The fate of all collaborators will be like this," a masked militiaman, wearing an Al Aqsa

An Israeli sniper points his rifle toward Bethlehem's le attack square, as Israeli forces continue to surround the allege place of Christ, the Church of the Nativity compound Tuesdat

headband, said before he and six others sped away.

Later Tuesday, an explosion rattled the Ramallah headquarters of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Tawfik Tirawi, head of Palestinian intelligence, said Israeli troops tried to destroy a wall between the prison inside the compound and Arafat's office. The army said the blast

ore red, Kyle 00,000 was the controlled destruction refighte grenades found in the con d the In Bethlehem, where a lice Di 230 armed Palestinian "Patric ing about 30 militiament xas and their way into the Church e Satur Nativity on April 2, Pales eptembe ush said proposed during a first rout negotiations to take the wa nd the re men to the Gaza Strip splay of stadiu international protection.



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