

Deportation row over Palestinians rumbles on

JERUSALEM: A row over Israel's mass deportation of Palestinian militants rumbled on despite a United States-negotiated compromise intended to defuse the crisis.

The deal, announced a week ago, has failed so far to get Middle East peace talks back on track or quell civil unrest among Palestinians living under Israeli rule.

Five sick deportees were taken to jail in Israel yesterday from hospital in Israel's self-declared south Lebanon security zone under Israel's offer to allow back 101 of the 415 Palestinians expelled on December 17.

But the 396 Palestinian exiles still stranded in a tent camp in no-man's land in

south Lebanon rejected the compromise offer, maintaining that Israel must readmit all of them.

Palestinian negotiators said they could not resume the Middle East peace talks, launched 15 months ago, until all the deportees were returned.

There were also signs that the US-Israeli understanding which gave birth to the compromise could be under some strain.

Israeli media reported that the United States was angered when the Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, said last week that the compromise showed Washington "accepted this reality" of the expulsions and Israel retained the right to deport more Palestinians.

Mr Rabin's spokesman, Gad Ben-Ari, said Israel had clarified to the US State Department that Mr Rabin had not said the United States viewed expulsions as legitimate.

"Israel made clarifications to State Department officials ... indicating

the Prime Minister never said or insinuated that the US accepts the principle of deportation or in any shape or form legitimises it," Mr Ben-Ari said.

But a statement earlier from Mr Rabin's office repeated that there was no guarantee that Israel would not expel Palestinians again.

The 415 Palestinians were deported on the grounds that they supported Islamic groups which had killed Israeli soldiers.

"The Israeli position is very clear," Mr Rabin said. "As in the past, in the future this will not be the normal

US deal so far unsuccessful

policy of Israel but in case of extraordinary situations."

The UN Security Council, in a resolution which the US

supported, demanded that all the Palestinians must be taken back. Israel refused, but feared possible UN sanctions.

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sanctions.

After Israel announced its offer to allow back 101 of the men — 14 mistaken deportees had already returned — the US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, said there was no need for further UN action.

Security forces have killed seven Palestinians living under Israeli rule in three days of clashes and protests over the deportations. Paramilitary police shot dead Riad Abdul an-Nabi, 16, in Shuafat refugee camp in Arab East Jerusalem on Sunday, and troops wounded 19 Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip and two in the occupied West Bank.

The army arrested Reuters reporter **Taher Shriteh** and Reuters Television cameraman Marwan al-Ghol while they were covering the clashes in Gaza City.

— Reuters

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