

## Voice of Shakthi Thursday 19 October 2000

The [Middle-East](#), it seems, is about to erupt yet again into a major confrontation between Israel and the Arab states. In hallowed lands trodden by great religious figures whose messages of peace is still adhered to by millions, their extremist followers fight over lands and buildings, power and influence.

As age-old enmities and prejudices spill over, the pent-up fury of a people who have been dispossessed of their homes, shut up in refugee camps and treated as second-class citizens for decades, has exploded. The [news](#) footage on Tuesday which showed a machine-gun wielding Israeli soldier, running in panic from a mob who simply did not care whether they lived or died, should illustrate best the feelings of the Palestine people today.

The persuasive powers of world leaders, now rushing frantically to bring an end to the fighting, may persuade Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak to salvage the peace process. Yet, whether the current round of talks would actually be part of a honorable settlement is open to question. As we know, the brokers have been less than honest in years past.

As long as Israel continues to believe their military and economic power and their connections with the West will shield them from condemnation, as long as they believe that traditions, culture and the aspirations of a people can be destroyed by helicopter gun-ships and, as long as they believe that their neighbours are hell-bent on wiping them out, no meaningful settlement can be reached in the Middle-East.

It is time for honesty and openness, for [leadership](#) of a high order from both sides, for a change of thinking from trying to score points, exert the biggest influence while innocent lives are lost. Whether Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak has the will and the capacity to do so is the question. At least in [Sri Lanka](#) we are definite about this aspect. Hopefully, such a tragedy will not be repeated in the Middle-East.