

Israel blasts Palestinian base

BEIRUT, Lebanon (AP) — Israeli warplanes turned to a new target in Lebanon on Monday, attacking the heavily fortified base of a Palestinian group in hills outside Beirut after 11 days of focusing on Hezbollah guerrillas.

U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher pressed ahead with efforts to broker a cease-fire, meeting again with Syrian President Hafez Assad to present a peace proposal.

As Lebanon's Muslims memorialized victims of last week's Israeli bombing raid on a U.N. base in south Lebanon that killed scores of refugees, peace remained elusive.

On the 12th day of fighting, Israeli air force jets hit a fresh target — a command base for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Like Hezbollah, the Popular Front opposes the Middle East peace process. The Syria-based group has frequently attacked Israel over the years but has not been directly involved in the recent fighting.

The choice of targets suggested growing Israeli frustration over efforts to pin down the elusive Hezbollah guerrillas, who are largely invisible in the valleys of south Lebanon.

The raid was the first in or near Beirut since Israeli warplanes rocketed Hezbollah strongholds in the southern suburbs last Tuesday.

Fighter-bombers fired at least eight rockets into the well-fortified Popular Front base in the coastal hills of Naameh, just south of the capital, sending pillars of smoke into the sky. There was no immediate word on casualties.

The Palestinian radicals are well-protected in Naameh by a concrete tunnel network that periodic Israeli airstrikes over the years have failed to destroy.

Hezbollah said it fired 30 Katyusha rockets into northern Israel on Monday, and the group threatened to introduce new weaponry into the conflict.

"Hezbollah possesses weapons which it has not used yet," said Sheik Nabil Kaouk, the group's southern commander. He did not elaborate.

Lebanese President Elias Hrawi was en route to New York to address a special session of the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday, while Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri traveled to Damascus, Syria.

The plan Christopher presented to Assad does not call for Israel's withdrawal from the Israeli-occupied zone in southern Lebanon.

"It's not a secure position. One is nervous about it, but there's nothing we can do."

LT. COL. WAME WAQANIVAVALAGI

Commander of U.N. Qana base

Burns said. That topic, he said, is reserved for peace discussions between Israel, Syria and Lebanon.

Following his talks with Assad, Christopher was to fly to Israel to meet with Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Since the fighting began between Israel and Hezbollah guerrillas, at least 137 people have been killed, most of them Lebanese civilians. Although no Israelis have been killed, more than 300 have been wounded on both sides. The attacks have forced 400,000 Lebanese and 20,000 Israelis from their homes.

Fighting in the main battle zone in south Lebanon has abated in the last couple of days. The Israeli army told residents of two towns near the Lebanese border that they could come out of bomb shelters, and educators planned to reopen schools there Tuesday.

Amid rain and gray skies, Israeli

warplanes mounted eight air raids on suspected guerrilla strongholds in eight villages near the market town of Nabatiyeh and 12 others close to the port of Tyre.

And Israeli artillery shelled areas just north of an Israeli-occupied border enclave, from which guerrillas have been trying to drive Israeli troops for more than a decade.

Shortly after midday, Hezbollah responded with rocket fire that the Israeli army said injured two people.

At the U.N. base in the south Lebanese village of Qana, the whoosh of outgoing Katyusha rockets could be heard, followed shortly afterward by the thud of incoming Israeli shells.

"It's not a secure position," said the commander of the U.N. base, Lt. Col. Wame Waqanivavalagi. "One is nervous about it, but there's nothing we can do."

Democrats put squeeze on Dole to raise wages

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Clinton administration and leading Democrats turned up the pressure Monday on Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole to schedule a vote promptly on legislation to raise the minimum wage.

"It's time for Senator Dole to lead, follow or get out of the way," Labor Secretary Robert B. Reich said.

"Let the majority rule. Let the Democrats and Republicans who support a higher minimum wage have a vote," Reich told the spring meeting of the AFL-CIO Building Trades Council. "The time for talk is over."

Senate Democratic Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota also urged Dole, the Kansas Republican virtually certain to face President Clinton in the election next November, to move quickly.

"Senator Dole says he is a doer," Daschle said. "The time has come to stop talking and start doing. ... Let's do it. Let's pass it."

In a speech on the Senate floor, Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., said he would offer a minimum-wage provision to other legislation as early as this week. He urged Dole to reconsider his plans to take up the issue only within a larger package of job-related matters.

"There is no reason to delay or saddle the minimum wage with other controversial measures," Kennedy said. "Senator Dole says it's politics, but it's hard to believe that this kind of inside-the-Beltway politics will work to his advantage."

Democrats are seeking a 90-cent increase in the wage floor, spread over two years. They contend that when adjusted for inflation, the current \$4.25-an-hour minimum, adopted in 1991, will by next January result in the least buying power of any minimum wage in almost 40 years.

Dole and many other congressional Republicans contend raising the minimum wage will result in a loss of jobs. Some businesses, they say, would have to lay off workers if they had to pay more.

"Somebody is going to lose their job because somebody else gets an increase," Dole said Sunday on CBS' "Face the Nation."

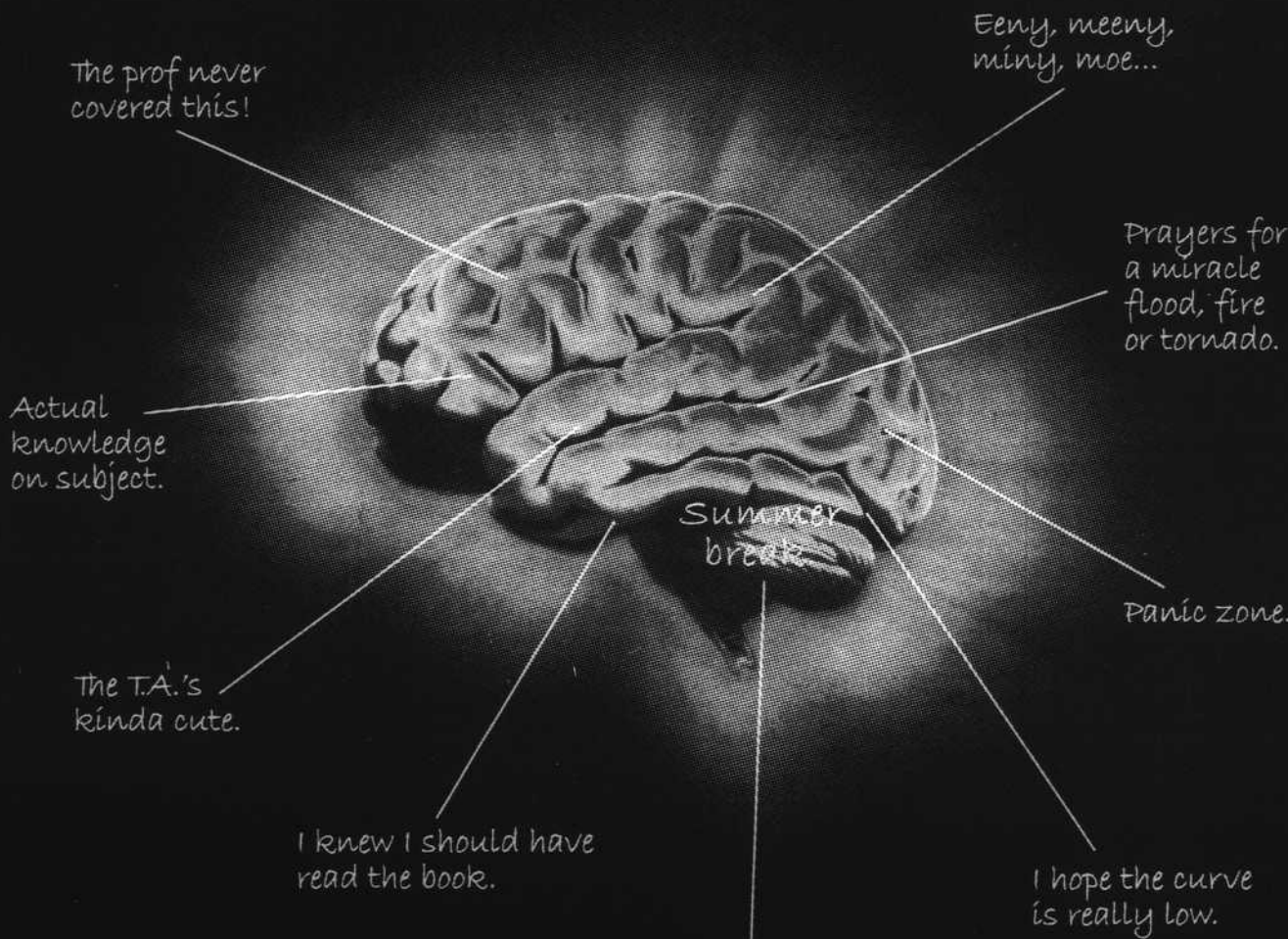
Dole and House Speaker Newt Gingrich acknowledged an increase is likely this year, possibly as part of a package deal that includes tax-cut and work-rule legislation.

In his AFL-CIO speech, Reich too called for "a simple, up-or-down, yes-or-no vote. ... No riders, no amendments, no back-room deals on anti-union, anti-worker provisions."

Reich, who has led the Clinton administration crusade for a higher minimum, contended a raise is "an issue of basic fairness."

"The CEOs of America's major corporations got a 23 percent raise last year — an average compensation of nearly \$4.5 million dollars each," he said. "Why can't we give 90 cents more an hour to millions of our nation's lowest-paid workers?"

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