Arafat dead at 75

RAMALLAH, West Bank (AP) —Yasser Arafat, who triumphantly forced his people's plight into the world spotlight but failed to achieve his lifelong quest for Palestinian statehood, died Thursday at age 75.

The French military hospital where he had been treated for nearly a month said he died at 3:30 a.m. The Palestinian leader spent his final days there in a coma.

Palestinian Cabinet Minister Saeb Erekat and Tayeb Abdel Rahim, a top Arafat aide, confirmed that Arafat died in a conversation with reporters at Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

White House spokesman Trent Duffy said the administration was waiting to comment until it confirmed Arafat had died. The State Department had no immediate comment.

The Palestinian parliament speaker will be sworn in as Palestinian Authority president in the coming hours.

Palestinian officials have said they want to ensure a smooth transition. Under Palestinian law, Parliament Speaker Rauhi Fattouh, a virtual unknown, is to become caretaker president until elections are held in 60 days.
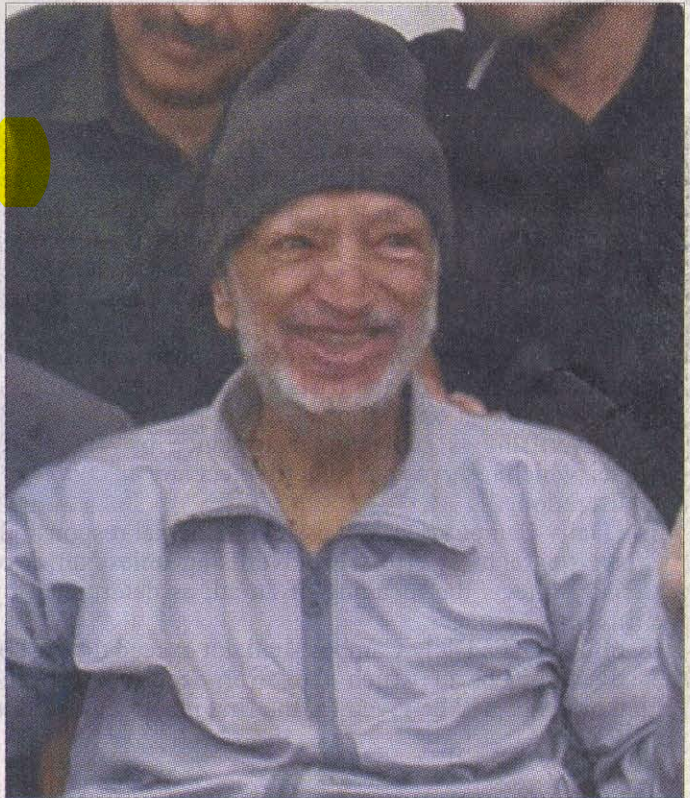
Arafat's last days were as murky and dramatic as his life. Flown to France on Oct. 29 after nearly three years of being penned in his West Bank headquarters by Israeli tanks, he initially improved but then sharply deteriorated as rumors swirled about his illness.

Top Palestinian officials flew in to check on their leader

AP

Palestinian Prime Minister Yarar Arafat died today during a conversation with reporters.