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Sharon slams Arafat during Ground Zero tour

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Visiting Ground Zero at the start of a five-day U.S. trip, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said yesterday that he expects the United States to pressure the Palestinians to stop terror attacks on Israelis.

Sharon arrived in New York a day after an Islamic militant blew himself up on an Israeli bus, killing himself and three passengers.

In all, seven Israelis have been killed in attacks this week, along with seven Palestinians — among them four assailants.

Sharon has said he holds Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat directly responsible for such attacks, arguing that the Palestinian Authority has done little to rein in militants.

"I expect and hope that the United States . . . will apply pressure on the Palestinians to stop all terror activity, violence and incitement," he said during a tour of the remains of the World Trade Center.

"I don't think we can reach the peace to which we aspire as long as Arafat runs a policy of violence and terror," Sharon said, standing on a raised stage next to Mayor Giuliani.

Asked about Sharon's frequent comparisons between Arafat and terror mastermind Osama Bin Laden, the mayor said: "There is no doubt that Yasser Arafat has participated in some of the worst terror attacks of the past 20 or 30 years."

The remarks of both men were punctuated by the sounds of the hauling of concrete, as wrecking cranes lifted away the ruins of the twin towers and eerie clouds rose from the site.

Sharon inspected a wall with flags of countries that lost citizens in the attack. He was to have signed his name next to the Israeli flag but mistakenly wrote next to the German flag: "Shalom from Jerusalem, Ariel Sharon."

After the mistake was pointed out, he added a simple signature next to the Israeli banner.

Sharon told Giuliani that 5,000 trees would be planted in memory of the victims at a forest in the Jerusalem hills. Giuliani gave Sharon a framed color photograph of a firefighter raising a U.S. flag at the scene of the attack.

On Monday, Sharon is to meet with President Bush at the White House.

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