

Hanegbi: IDF will stay in Gaza until tunnels destroyed

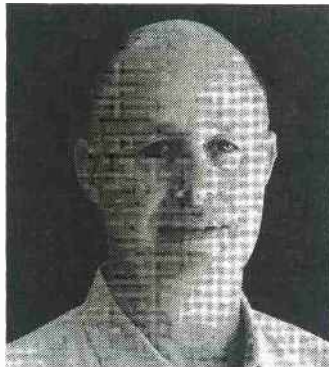
• By HERB KEINON

The IDF will remain in the Gaza Strip until it destroys the last terrorist tunnel it knows about, Deputy Foreign Minister Tzachi Hanegbi said Wednesday.

Hanegbi said that he did not believe the destruction of the tunnels would be a long process, and that the reason it is taking as long as it has is because it is being done while the army has to defend the forces who are neutralizing the tunnels.

Israel, he added at a press briefing in Jerusalem, will not agree to a cease-fire that does not allow it to continue destroying the underground labyrinth.

"The Israeli government would not survive if we know



TZACHI HANEGBI
(Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

that there are tunnels, that they are there, but withdraw and go tell the people who live on the border that they live in a casino - that maybe they will come and kill them, maybe not," Hanegbi said.

According to Hanegbi, some

179 Hamas terrorists have been arrested and are providing information about the Gaza "tunnel industry," as well as giving the IDF knowledge of additional tunnels.

"We just found three new ones in the last 24 hours, and might find more in the future," he said.

Hanegbi said that a problem Israel was facing now, as it has for the last 66 years, is that when it shows restraint, the other side "translates any kind of moderation, restraint, sanity as a sign of weakness, as a symptom that Israel is not determined to defend itself."

While in the West compromise is a part of life, in dealing with "zealot organizations" in the Middle East, such "demonstrations of normality, reality, pragmatism and

moderation are translated as a sign of weakness, and when you see the enemy is weak, you try to move forward and harm them more," he said.

Hanegbi, responding to world criticism of the civilian casualties in Gaza, said that Israel was committed to international law, and at times gave up missions, and even compromised IDF soldiers, to avoid hitting civilian targets.

Hanegbi said that Israel was committed to the Egyptian cease-fire proposal, and believed it was logical that Egypt, which has a border with the Gaza Strip and is "passionate" about the Palestinians, plays a central role, adding Israel and Egypt share the vision of Gazans living "a normal life."