

Gulf widens between two Cypruses

Ann Brady talks to the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktaş, right, who remains pessimistic that a solution can be forged through a UN peace initiative in Geneva

ALTHOUGH Rauf Denktaş, the Turkish Cypriot leader, flies to Geneva today ahead of talks with the United Nations secretary general, he remains convinced that both sides on the divided east Mediterranean island are back to square one.

He believes that the Greek Cypriots have no intention of sharing power with the Turkish Cypriots.

"We shall never move from square one, because square one was the destruction of a partnership state and the acquisition, under false pretences, of the title of the government of Cyprus by Greek Cypriots; and they still want to maintain it," he said.

The peace initiative this week by the UN chief, Kofi Annan, is the latest attempt to break the deadlock. It reflects the Security Council's concern at the military build-up on both sides of the island — including Russian missiles due to arrive on the Greek side next year — and the tensions that persist since last summer's killings of Greek Cypriots in the buffer zone.

The UN will head the "informal talks" at the talks on Wednesday. But Mr Denktaş has made his position clear: "If the missiles arrive we shall stop all negotiations."

He has also threatened to open Varosha, the former Greek Cypriot resort area of Famagusta, a ghost town which he has held as a bargaining chip since the Turkish army invasion in 1974.

According to Gustave Feissel, the UN representative in Cyprus, there is no longer time to be blasé. "The situation has been held together by Scotch tape which can't hold in the long run."

Mr Denktaş is frustrated and angry at the international community's accusations of intransigence on his part in finding a settlement. Like the caged pet canary,

singing its heart out in the corner of his Nicosia office, Mr Denktaş has been singing as loudly as he can for more than 20 years to gain international acceptance for the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, recognised only by Ankara. But his song has fallen on deaf ears and, as a result, the north has moved inevitably toward integration with Turkey.

Many believe Turkey is using northern Cyprus as leverage to achieve EU membership. But although there are mixed feelings about the closer links, it is generally accepted that there is no alternative. Ramiz Manyera, a small businessman in Nico-

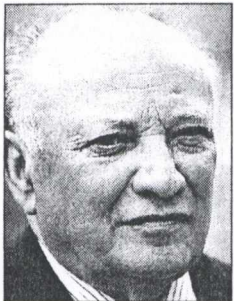
'Because your economy is not good, you don't sell your liberty'

sia, said: "Local people hate it, but we are caught between the Greek Cypriots and the Turks. All the businesses here now are being taken over by the Turks, and if the Cyprus problem lasts another 20 years, we are finished as Cypriot Turks. We have become beggars, but we can't bite the hand that feeds us."

Many young people, already disillusioned, are leaving. Ayshe, aged 35, who works in a Kyrenia supermarket, said: "I want a solution. People are fed up living in a limbo."

Despite no obvious signs of poverty among the north's population of 180,000, the financial situation is deteriorating. And with 35,000 Turkish troops stationed in the north, Turkish Cypriots are more concerned about the economy than the threat of missiles from the south.

The first £31 million tranche of a £156 million



Helena Smith meets Glafkos Clerides, the island's Greek-elected president, left, who says he will stockpile more weapons if a settlement cannot be negotiated

elected president, Glafkos Clerides, and his rightwing coalition government, are wary of the methods used by Dr Matsakis — a British-trained forensic pathologist who will be a candidate in next year's presidential elections.

But the success of his campaign reflects the level of frustration at political failure in this otherwise flourishing corner of the Levant. The pessimism has intensified as relations have worsened between Greece and Turkey — which, along with Britain, are guarantors of the island's constitution.

"No president on this side

'If each side sticks to its position, we are not going to see a solution'

will meet the demands of the Turkish side because they're not even in accordance with the concept of negotiation." Mr Clerides said "If each side sticks to its position we're not going to see a solution."

Mr Clerides, aged 78, oversaw the first intercommunal talks when the two sides began to fight over the constitutional workings of the former British colony in the early 1960s and says he wants a solution.

He is a long-time friend of the Turkish Cypriot leader, Rauf Denktaş. "I sent him wedding cake when my daughter married last year," he says, and describes Mr Denktaş as the best "negotiator" Turkish Cypriots could possibly have. Both men are London-trained lawyers.

But as the nationalist mood has grown, Mr Cler-

ides has gradually been forced to take a tougher stance. His hugely popular decision to add Russian anti-aircraft missiles to what is already one of the world's most heavily militarised countries — Cyprus spends more per capita on defence than Israel — has stoked passions like never before.

Western diplomats say the atmosphere between the two sides is now "so foul" that UN proposals to reunite them in a bi-zonal federation have been sidelined while the UN tries to ease tensions with a range of "goodwill gestures".

Mr Clerides would like to reach an agreement "in principle" by the start of the Cypriot election campaign this August. But the return of about 200,000 refugees to their homes and continuing hostility to a federation — even if it is publicly denied — remain big sticking points.

The president says a solution would not be "saleable" without the Turkish Cypriots, who represent 18 per cent of the island's total population, at least agreeing to reduce their territory.

If a solution is found, he says the island will be automatically demilitarised. If not, he contends the military might of "free" Cyprus will grow even more.

"If there is no settlement, I will proceed not only with the missiles but with other sophisticated weapons because as long as there are 40,000 Turkish troops [in the north] we have the right to defend ourselves," he said.

"These are very expensive toys and unless the Turkish air force attacks me, I'm not going to be firing them. To provoke Turkey I'd have to be ready for a lunatic asylum."

credit package, agreed with Turkey three months ago, is only due to arrive this month and the government has at times been unable to pay public-sector workers.

Mr Denktaş brushes aside such fears. "We have lived through economic disasters in Turkey. There is no other alternative. Because your economy is not good, you don't sell your liberty, you don't sell out on your security. The people don't need any convincing on these matters. They know what security is for them."

As president of the break-away state, Mr Denktaş, aged 72, has no constitutional powers, but he has dominated the political scene for the past 30 years. A stocky and avuncular man, he is viewed as an upright, moral figure by most Turkish Cypriots — and their only chance for a solution.

A British trained lawyer, he has made the Cyprus case his *raison d'être*, despite undergoing heart surgery last year. It is difficult to see who can follow in his footsteps. His eldest son, Raif — whom many thought would succeed him — was killed in a car accident.

His younger son, Serdar, aged 38, is the deputy prime minister, but Mr Denktaş denies accusations that he is running a dynasty. "You can't run a dynasty in a democracy... I would not have my own loved ones enter politics and suffer the way I suffered."

He says he intends to retire at the end of his current term, in three years' time. "I want to enjoy my life for a few years before I die."

IT IS a sign of the anger in southern Cyprus that giant posters of the faces of three murdered men adorn the Greek side of the main checkpoint on the line dividing the island's two communities.

Until the death of the three "martyrs" last summer, nothing much seemed to have changed in 22 years at the crossover of the world's last divided capital.

But shortly after the two young men and a retired fireman were killed by Turks in the buffer zone separating the communities — two while engaging in protest demonstrations and one collecting snails — Dr Marlos Matsakis paid for their images to be pasted on waterproof billboards.

He also began a one-man campaign to turn away tourists intent on visiting "occupied northern Cyprus" from the entry point. The move quickly gained widespread support.

Now those who lost relatives and homes when Turkey invaded the island in 1974 join Dr Matsakis every weekend in his crusade to persuade foreigners not to cross the line.

By noon last Saturday, the group of women with pictures of their missing sons and husbands hung around their necks had persuaded dozens of tourists to stay on their side of the 111-mile-long United Nations buffer zone. Tourist money would not now be lost in the self-declared Turkish Cypriot state.

The island's Greek-

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