

Attack on Israeli embassy Fundamentalists claim responsibility

BUENOS AIRES, Mar 19 : An Islamic fundamentalist group in Beirut claimed responsibility Wednesday for the Israeli Embassy bombing that killed at least 12 people and injured more than 250 others, reports AP.

The death toll seemed likely to rise. Rescuers who worked slowly all night with picks and shovels eventually switched to cranes and front loaders as the possibility of finding survivors faded. An embassy spokeswoman said five Israelis, and possibly other victims, were believed dead in the rubble.

In Israel, Foreign Minister David Levy threatened retaliation. "Those who carried out these murders and those who sent them can expect painful punishment," he told Parliament. "The Israeli government will choose the place and manner to avenge the blood of the fallen."

An earlier report said: The car bombing of the Israeli Embassy that killed more than 20 people has only strengthened relations between Argentina and Israel, President Carlos Menem said, reports AP.

As a memorial march was planned for Thursday afternoon from the obelisk that is the city's landmark to the embassy, 11 dead Israelis were to be flown home, the vice president of the World Jewish Congress, Kalman Sultanik said. However, still more bodies were believed to lie in the rubble.

"Argentina was a victim as much as Israel," Menem, a son of Syrian immigrants, said Wednesday.

The dead were about equally divided among Israelis and Argentines, but the vast majority of the 250 injured were Argentines. The car bomb damaged the neighbourhood for blocks. The parochial school across the street must be torn down. Homes were destroyed. Telephone, electricity, gas and water lines all were interrupted.

"Contrary to weakening relations with Israel, it (the bombing) strengthens them," said Menem, who in 1989 invited Israel's president to visit Argentina for the first time, and reciprocated last year, also a first.

World welcomes outcome of referendum in S Africa

HARARE, Mar 19 : British Prime Minister John Major yesterday warmly welcomed the outcome of South Africa's whites-only referendum, saying it sounded South Africa's return to the international community, reports Xinhua.

South African President F W de Klerk has won 68.7 per cent of the votes in Tuesday's referendum called by him last month to test white support for his reforms.

This result would never have been achieved without the courage and leadership shown by President F W de Klerk, 4 Major said in a statement released by the British embassy in Cape Town.

He said: "I congratulate the white electorate for choosing the path of reform. It will bring South Africa back into the international community."

The white electorate has chosen a democratic, non-racial future for South Africa. Their decision will be backed by the vast majority of South Africans who did not vote, but whose future was just as much at stake, Major said.

Xinhua adds: Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao has hailed the support of whites in South Africa to the political process of ending apartheid in that country.

The Prime Minister was extending congratulations in a message to South African President De Klerk on winning support in a referendum from a majority of the South African whites to his political reforms aimed at dismantling apartheid, the Press Trust of India reported last night.

A Lagos report says: The Nigerian government today welcomed the outcome of South Africa's whites-only referendum on President F W de Klerk's constitutional reforms. In a statement issued in

Nigeria's new capital of Abuja, the government noted that the "yes" vote to the negotiation process has removed the major obstacle in transforming South Africa from a racially-segregated country into a non-racial, united and democratic society.

Another report adds: The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) of South Africa said this yesterday that it was "ordinately glad" about the "yes" majority result of the March 17 whites-only referendum.

IFP spokesman Walter Lelgate said his party believed that the basis of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) was too narrow.

The IFP would continue to fight for the admission of the rightwing conservative party as well as the Pan Africanist Congress to CODESA, Lelgate said.

Off the Record

Radiation in one breast causes cancer in other

BOSTON: Breast cancer radiation treatments seem to pose a significant risk of cancer in the other breast for women under 45, but the hazard is too small to warrant a change in the way the illness is treated, a new study has found, reports Reuter.

For older women, however, radiation treatments appear to carry little risk that cancer will develop in the other breast, according to the study, published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

The research was done because radiation, which has become an increasingly popular technique of curing early breast cancer, can itself cause cancer.

In the past, some of the radiation intended for a cancerous breast may have spilled onto the healthy breast.

Until relatively recently, radiation treatments were used in conjunction with extensive surgery but now it is common for doctors to remove as little breast tissue as possible and really more heavily on the treatments.

Breast cancer appears in approximately one woman in nine and is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women.

The highest risk groups are women between 30 and 50 years of age and those at age 65.

Use condoms to reach targets

WASHINGTON: Developing Nations will have to consume 44 billion condoms and 8.8 billion packets of birth control pills if U N population targets are to be reached by the year 2,000, according to a report published Wednesday, reports AP.

The international family planning perspectives estimated that with the current population in developing countries hovering around four billion, the U N projections for keeping it to five billion by the turn of the century would require an expenditure of more than five billion dollars.

About 60 per cent of the adults in Brazil, China, Colombia, South Korea, Thailand and Turkey practice contraception but the methods vary in each region.

Female sterilization is widely used in Southeast Asia and Latin America and Intra Uterine Devices (IUD) are most prevalent in East Asia and North Africa.

About nine per cent of the women in developing countries who practice birth control take the pill while some six per cent of men use condoms.

Nothing but a romantic liaison

LONDON: Wealthy Texan Steve Wyatt was quoted Thursday as saying he is deeply upset over reports that Prince Andrew and the Duchess of York will announce a separation and that his friendship with Andrew's wife is platonic, reports AP.

"I have never had any romantic liaisons, ever, with the Duchess. We are still friends but it is just a platonic friendship. I and the Duke of York, Prince Andrew are also good friends," the Daily Express quoted 38-year-old Wyatt as saying.

News media reports say that Andrew, the second of Queen Elizabeth II's three sons, and the former Sarah Ferguson are preparing to announce their separation after five years of marriage and two children.

Another London paper, the Daily Mail, said Wednesday that media discussion about the friendship between Wyatt and the Duchess — widely known as "Fergie" had brought matters to a head between the royal couple.

In January, the Daily Mail reported that photographs of her and Wyatt taken while they were vacationing in Morocco with friends were found by a cleaner at a London apartment vacated by Wyatt. It said then that the pictures were shown to the paper before being handed to police.

Speaking from his Washington office, Wyatt was quoted by the Daily Express as saying, "I wish the Duke and Duchess of York the very best of luck in these trying times."

Buckingham Palace has refused to comment on reports in the Daily Mail and other newspapers on Wednesday that Sarah is depressed by criticism and determined on a separations.

They were thought of as an unusually happy couple in spite of the steady criticism of the Duchess.

Press reports describe her as noisy, tactless, more interested in vacations than work, and a poor mother.

UN will try to convince Myanmar

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 19 : Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali intends to send a senior official to Myanmar shortly in an effort to convince the military junta to stem the flow of refugees forced into neighbouring states, UN sources said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Undersecretary-General Jan Eliasson of Sweden, who is emergency relief humanitarian coordinator, is likely to go to Dhaka in Bangladesh at the beginning of April while waiting for a reply on whether he is welcome in Yangon, Myanmar.

Burma, known as Myanmar, has refused to recognise the Rohingya as its nationals and has said they will not be allowed to return.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia intends to bring up the crisis when she sees President George Bush in Washington today, diplomats said. She meets Boutros-Ghali in New York on Friday.

Eliasson's mission is mainly humanitarian but he is expected to refer to a two-week old call from Boutros-Ghali that asks Myanmar to deal with the causes of the exodus.

The sources said Eliasson just returned from Geneva after a briefing from Sadako Ogata, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who has said that the number of refugees could reach 300,000 by the end of next month and has appealed for 27.5 million dollars in emergency aid.

Bangladesh envoys at the United Nations have approached Security Council members, particularly its Asian members — China, India and Japan — to discuss possible moves to halt the flow of refugees.

Myanmar's rulers have also been under attack by the UN Human Rights Commission following their annulment of elections in May 1990, won by the national league for democracy. Its leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, is under house arrest.

Troops capture another Tamil rebel camp

COLOMBO, Mar 19 : Some 3,000 government troops in a continuing operation in north-eastern Sri Lanka, captured another Tamil rebel camp and destroyed two guerrilla vehicles, military officials said Thursday, reports AP.

The rebels put up a stiff resistance but abandoned their fortified bunkers and camps when troops advanced towards the guerrilla camp at Kokkuttoduvai, 256 kilometers (164 miles) northeast of Colombo, they said.

Three soldiers suffered minor injuries in Wednesday's fighting, but the rebels reportedly suffered heavy casualties when aircraft and helicopter gunships destroyed two vehicles fleeing from the region.



PRETORIA: ANC supporters carry banner during a march supporting President Frederik de Klerk, who secured a convincing victory after the overwhelming "yes" vote in the South African referendum for reform. —AFP/UNB photo

Blacks demonstrate for power

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 19 : More than 20,000 South African blacks demonstrated yesterday in Cape Town demanding real power soon after President F W de Klerk won Tuesday's reform referendum, reports Xinhua.

The demonstrators converged around the parliament building, demanding racial equalities in education, pensions and other social services.

They also called for speedy introduction of an interim government to oversee South Africa's transition to a non-racial and democratic country.

Apartheid at a glance

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 19 : Here is a look at the apartheid situation since President F W de Klerk took office in 1989 and major issues facing the nation's political leaders:

What's Changed

Black opposition groups such as the African National Congress have been legalised. The government has begun negotiating to write a new constitution ending white rule.

— More than 1,000 political prisoners, including ANC leader Nelson Mandela, have been freed.

— Blacks, previously restricted to land ownership in 13 per cent of the country, may buy land anywhere.

— Whites-only public schools may be integrated if 72 per cent of parents vote in favour of the change.

— Neighbourhoods, hospitals, public transportation, parks and other public facilities and buildings are no longer segregated.

What Hasn't Changed

— The black majority may not vote.

— De facto segregation remains in many institutions reflecting the huge economic difference between the 5 million whites and 30 million blacks.

— Education largely remains segregated, and most blacks attend inferior schools.

Major Issues

— Constitution: Both sides want a new constitution giving voting rights to the black majority. But the government favours safeguards to protect whites and other minorities.

— Interim Government: The government insists it must remain in power during the talks and any subsequent transition to maintain order. The ANC wants an interim government.

— Economy: The government says only a free-market system can solve the country's economic problems. The ANC wants measures to compensate blacks for apartheid and favours state economic intervention.

Landslide claims 37 in Brazil

RIO DE JANEIRO, Mar 19 : A landslide roared through a rain-soaked shantytown in a southeastern city on Wednesday, killing at least 37 people and burying scores of others, officials said, reports AP.

Rescuers worked through the night, digging through the mud and wreckage for the missing. Police said the death toll could rise to 150.

"We have reports that dozens of people, most of them children, some of our people say 200, couldn't get away and were buried alive," said Police Chief Paulo Mansur. "We won't know how many for days."

Mansur said 37 bodies were found at the site. The Belo Horizonte morgue said seven of the 10 bodies identified so far were children. Seventy

people dug out of the huge mound of earth were hospitalized, Mansur said.

The disaster occurred at an outlying hillside district of Belo Horizonte, capital of Minas Gerais state 290 miles (470 kilometers) northwest of Rio.

About 400 brick and wooden shacks were destroyed in the Barraginha slum, home to 1,000 of the shantytowns 40,000 residents, said fire department Sgt. Estegeno da Luz.

He estimated 100 to 150 people were still pinned under the slide.

"I was only able to save my baby boy," one woman sobbed, leaning on her husband's shoulder for support. I couldn't carry the other. God, he's still in there."

There was no official explanation for the landslide, and

no investigation was planned until after the rescue operation.

The independent Jornal do Brasil news service quoted local engineers as saying a landslide on which a construction company had its offices gave way after days of rain.

It said a 300-foot-(100-meter) wide shelf of mud that supported the construction firm, perched atop a hill above the slum, collapsed suddenly.

The avalanche flipped trucks and cars and pushed pine trees hundreds of feet down the hill.

"There was a large tremor and a loud noise and then a wall of earth swept down the hill," Luz said by telephone. "Those poor people never had a chance to get away."

25pc cut in US army by '97

WASHINGTON, Mar 19 : The US Army has begun to give about 2,000 senior officers and enlisted men and women the news that they've been selected for "early retirement" and must leave the service within six months, reports AP.

The move is part of the Defence Department's effort to slash its forces by 25 per cent by 1997.

It affects several groups of soldiers who have been in the Army for more than 20 years and therefore are eligible for retirement — primarily those holding the rank of lieutenant colonel, full colonel, command sergeant major and sergeant major, said Army spokeswoman Maj. Barbara Goodno.

The unwelcome word that the Army doesn't want them any more will be delivered by the end of this week.

It must be delivered in person, and by the general in charge of the soldiers who's been cut, Goodno said.

"It's really tough," said one colonel whose voice cracked as he revealed his name was on the list. "You've given your life to something, you work so hard... and now this."

Another officer pointed to a picture of his young children. "My reasons are ready. I really have to worry about what's important now," said the officer, who'd hoped he'd been spared. "But I know that this is just the first melt. There will be more cuts to come."

No lists of those chosen will be made public because such an action could affect a command officer's position in relation to his troops, Goodno said.

The Army spokeswoman said boards of senior Army officers began meeting in January, with each member of a board individually going over officers' records to determine the cuts.

Those officers affected will receive retirement pay, medical benefits and commissary privileges for life, just as if they had chosen to retire, Goodno said.

But they may be retiring at a lower rank than they'd hoped for, and far sooner than they had expected.

"What makes this difficult is that it hits people at mid-career, many with mortgages and small children," Goodno said. "There's a psychological impact to it when you are told, 'You're good, but we just can't use you anymore.'"

The Army, which now has about 685,000 men and women, must cut its force to 535,000 over the next five years.

Congress is pressing for even deeper cuts in the defence budget. But Pentagon leaders hope their plans for reducing the 2 million-strong active duty force to 1.6 million will survive despite pressure from Capitol Hill.

Officers began meeting in January, with each member of a board individually going over officers' records to determine the cuts.

Those officers affected will receive retirement pay, medical benefits and commissary privileges for life, just as if they had chosen to retire, Goodno said.

But they may be retiring at a lower rank than they'd hoped for, and far sooner than they had expected.

"What makes this difficult is that it hits people at mid-career, many with mortgages and small children," Goodno said. "There's a psychological impact to it when you are told, 'You're good, but we just can't use you anymore.'"

The Army, which now has about 685,000 men and women, must cut its force to 535,000 over the next five years.

Congress is pressing for even deeper cuts in the defence budget. But Pentagon leaders hope their plans for reducing the 2 million-strong active duty force to 1.6 million will survive despite pressure from Capitol Hill.

Accord to divide Bosnia into three zones

ZAGREB, Croatia, Mar 19 : Leaders of Bosnia-Herzegovina have agreed to divide the breakaway Yugoslav republic into three autonomous ethnic zones, reports Reuter.

But the shaky accord is already being interpreted differently by the republic's Serbs and Muslims.

Indian General Satish Nambiar, Commander of the peace-keepers, said things were going well.

Arabs won't comply with sanction on Libya

CAIRO, Mar 19 : Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel-Maguid said on Wednesday he did not think Arab countries would comply with UN sanctions western powers want to impose on Libya, reports Reuter.

Abdel-Maguid told reporters at a press dinner that Libya had agreed to submit to a ruling by the International Court of Justice in the Hague on whether to hand over two men accused of blowing up a Pan Am airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988.

"This is very difficult for the Arab states to say to the Libyan ambassadors accredited to us, 'go home,'" he added.

Thai troops evict Myanmar soldiers from a mortar base

MAE HONG SON, Thailand, Mar 19 : Thai troops have evicted Myanmar soldiers from a mortar base in northern Thailand that they set up to attack Karen rebels from the rear, killing dozens, Thai officers said today.

"We received the order to clear the areas today after the Myanmar soldiers were withdrawn from that territory," an army captain who had been in the thick of the fighting told Reuters today.

The Myanmar incursion force pulled out late on Wednesday and regrouped on the border line, he said.

His force had learned from interceptions of Myanmar radio communications that at least 30 Myanmar soldiers were killed by Thai artillery, mortar

and small-arms fire, he said.

They found 15 bodies when they moved in today.

On Tuesday, Thai aircraft bombed the dug-in mortar base, killing at least five Myanmar soldiers.

"They pulled back but I believe that they will return very soon to take their left-behind artillery or mortars," another Thai officer said.

Radio interceptions revealed that a commander inside Myanmar had ordered fleeing soldiers to return to retrieve their big guns, the officer said from the Thai headquarters in the village schoolhouse in Doi Seang, three km from the fighting.

More than 800 Thai soldiers have been rushed to the area, 650 km northwest of

Bangkok, to push out 300 Myanmar soldiers — part of Yangon's operation Dragon King — dry-season offensive against the Karen.

The Karen, Christians in Buddhist Myanmar with their own language and alphabet, have been fighting for autonomy from Yangon for 40 years.

The Myanmar troops crossed into Thailand last Friday near Doi Seang, 40 km west of the provincial capital, Mae Hong Son town. One Thai ranger was killed and five wounded.

Lieutenant-Colonel Aung Myat, the Karen commander in the Myanmar jungle near Doi Seang, said today his 800 weary fighters were engaging 500 to 600 fresh Myanmar troops.

Yangon forces were advancing

on the Karen headquarters at Manerplaw, 120 km south of Mae Hong Son on the river Moei, said Myanmar television monitored in Thailand on Wednesday night.

Myanmar forces had captured two more small rebel outposts near sleeping Dog Hill, "a major strategic site overlooking the Karen front line that the Myanmar took last weekend."

On Tuesday and Wednesday, Myanmar soldiers found 33 Karen bodies and seized many weapons, the television reported. One Myanmar soldier was killed and nine wounded, it said.

The Myanmar troops were shelling Manerplaw from sleeping Dog Hill on Wednesday, a Thai officer based near Manerplaw said.

Eight shells landed in the jungle on the Thai side of the river.

A senior Karen official contacted in Thailand by telephone said his stronghold was now in the range of Myanmar artillery fire.

Fighting was also raging at Kaw Moo Ra, the Karen's number 2 camp, 150 km south of Manerplaw.

A Thai border patrol officer in Mae Sot, across the river from Kaw Moo Ra, said 50 wounded Myanmar soldiers had been killed when military trucks evacuating them from the battlefield struck landmines and then were ambushed by Karens.

Gunfire resounded in the Mae valley around Kaw Moo Ra today. Thai officers said the shooting had lessened since

they fired on Myanmar positions to stop border incursions.

Em Marta, spokesman for the Karen national union, the political arm of the rebellion, said on Wednesday evening he was confident Manerplaw would be saved.

"Sleeping Dog Hill was the first line of defence," he told a symposium in Bangkok. "There is still the second line, the river, and the third line around White Elephant Mountain."

"Manerplaw is still safe for this year," he said. If it took two and a half months to take Sleeping Dog Hill, it will take them two and a half months to take the second line and by then it will be the rainy season."

MPs foil move to restore Aristide

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Mar 19 : A walkout by legislators has thwarted an attempt to turn back the clock on a military coup and restore exiled President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power, reports AP.

Supporters of the plan say they fear opponents have new stalling tactics in store for them. But they are determined to try again.

"We have all the time in the world," Senate President Dejean Belizaire said Wednesday evening, after the walkout by opposing lawmakers left a special parliament session without a quorum and forced Belizaire to suspend it.