

Kabul returns to normalcy

KABUL, June 6: A commando-style militia on Saturday sent reinforcements to help the caretaker Islamic government enforce a cease-fire between pro-Iranian and Saudi-backed rebel groups after recent clashes heightened fears of a full-scale sectarian war, reports AP.

Hundreds of Uzbek fighters, belonging to a militia based in northern Afghanistan, landed at Kabul airport and fanned out to help rebels loyal to the new Afghan leadership stop the fighting that has left at least 100 people dead and hundreds more wounded.

Hezb-e-Wahadat, a loose coalition of eight small Iranian-backed parties, and the ultra-orthodox Ittihad-e-Islami supported by Saudi Arabia agreed to a third cease-fire and released hundreds of prisoners seized during the fighting. Most were innocent civilians who, dazed by anger, told tales of beating and torture.

Hezb-e-Wahadat represents Afghanistan's minority Shi'ites, known as Hazaras. Ittihad-e-Islami is comprised of Pashtu-speaking Sunni Muslims, who dominated Afghanistan for nearly three centuries but fear their hold on power is being chipped away by other ethnic minorities.

"The torture was intolerable. They hit us with the butt of their guns and chains, saying you have killed our brothers," said Nadir Ali, a 22-year-old Shi'ite and candy-maker who was grabbed by Ittihad-e-Islami fighters while walking to work on Tuesday. He said he was crammed into a small shipping container with about 50 other prisoners and given no food or water.

Each side accused the other of starting the fighting and of looting homes, gouging out the eyes and beheading some prisoners.

On Saturday, for the first time in four days, the blasts of exploding rockets, mortars and tanks stopped. But the destruction left behind was enormous.

Entire blocks of shops had been destroyed. The streets were littered with shattered glass, downed power lines and charred bricks. Dozens of homes had been burned.

Li Gen Akram Hamra, a senior commander in the militia that helped oust the former Communist regime and install a weak and ineffective Islamic government in late April, accused the warring sides of trying to break up the country after 14 years of civil war.

"We're not going to allow them to divide Afghanistan, they may be divided among themselves but we will not allow them to do this to the country. We have enough arms and ammunition to fight for 10 more years," Hamra said. "We want peace."

Many militia commanders as well as rebels and diplomats suspect renegade rebel leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar of having some role in the latest fighting.

Sarajevo Airport reopens soon Muslims end blockade

SARAJEVO, June 6: Muslim fighters ended their month-long blockade of a downtown Sarajevo barracks Friday and let about 800 Yugoslav army soldiers and their families leave, reports AP.

UN officials in Sarajevo termed the withdrawal "a major breakthrough."

"We can now start talking business with the two sides," said Adnan Abdel Razak, a UN spokesman.

At the United Nations, spokesman Francois Gulliani said Friday an agreement had been reached in principle to reopen Sarajevo Airport and permit delivery of humanitarian aid.

But as if to punctuate that progress in calming the Bosnian battleground is tenuous, bright orange flashes streaked through the evening sky as Serb irregulars resumed shelling Sarajevo from their hillside positions.

At the five-story UN headquarters, curious French soldiers, dressed only in their T-shirts and shorts, crouched behind the rattling windows watching red tracers and explosions.

They dropped to the floor as gunfire sounded from high-rise buildings across the street. The UN building took no hits.

The Serb-led army has been accused of aiding minority Bosnian Serbs, who favour unity with Belgrade. Although the army officially is in retreat, an estimated 80,000 of its troops plan to remain behind to join Serb irregulars, with whom they have captured about two-thirds of Bosnia's territory.

After their release from the Marshal Tito barracks, the Yugoslav soldiers headed for a Serb-controlled area on the southwest edge of the city in four convoys flanked by UN armored personnel carriers and blue Bosnian police cars.

Bosnian forces had surrounded the barracks to force the troops leave heavy weapons behind. The troops left their artillery, but it wasn't known whether the weapons were operational. In a previous episode at a besieged barracks, troops destroyed their big guns before abandoning them.

An agreement in principle was reached after three days of United Nations negotiations to reopen Sarajevo Airport and permit UN-supervised delivery of humanitarian aid in strife-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Gulliani said the UN Protection Force, UNPROFOR, would operate the airport, secure the nearby hills and supervise all heavy weapons and other artillery.

More UN troops, military observers and police would be required and a more detailed report will be given to the UN Security Council next week on how to reopen and operate the airport.

It was not known how soon the airport would actually re-

Off the Record

Heartache behind the smile

LONDON: Buckingham Palace faced a stormy weekend after Britain's newspapers published devastating tales of the alleged heartache hidden behind the smile of a princess said to believe she will never be queen, reports Reuter.

The palace tried to maintain a stoic silence over claims that unhappy Princess Diana tried to kill herself in despair over her marriage to the heir to the throne, Prince Charles.

The image of the British royal family had already been battered this year by the divorce of Queen Elizabeth's daughter, Princess Anne, and the breakup of the six-year marriage of her second son, Prince Andrew, to Sarah "Fergie" Ferguson.

Palace officials denied that Diana, the Princess of Wales, had cooperated in any way with a book claiming to tell the inside story of her life as one of the world's favourite royals.

The denial did nothing to stem a flood of press stories alleging that the glamorous 30-year-old Princess was locked into a loveless marriage with Charles, 12 years her senior, and was so desperate that she tried to commit suicide.

Sunday Times Editor Andrew Neil, whose newspaper starts serialising the book this weekend, claimed the Princess believed she would never be queen. He hinted that she had tried to take her own life not once but several times.

The Daily Mail which broke the story of the alleged suicide attempt six years ago in an extract from a second book, said that Diana suffered from the slimmer's illness bulimia nervosa for the first eight years of her marriage.

Under the headline "The unhappiness behind the smile," the Mail said she conquered the illness in 1989 after seeing a psychiatrist and overcoming her insecurity and depression.

"This is not gossip from below stairs. These are stories straight from the heart of Kensington Palace," said daily Mail gossip columnist Nigel Dempster.



Next NAM summit in Jakarta

JAKARTA, June 6: The Non-Aligned Movement is to hold its 10th summit in Jakarta in September, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Friday, reports AFP.

In the run-up to the meeting of heads of state or government from NAM's 105 member countries from September 1-5, senior officials will meet on August 28, followed by a ministerial-level meeting on August 29 and 30, before documentation day, on August 31, spokesman Suteja Kartawijaya told AFP.

On September 4 there might be a commemorative visit to Bandung for heads of state and heads of government or heads of delegation, he said, adding however that the plan was still tentative.



JERUSALEM: Israeli Peace activists, acting as Israeli and Arab (L), point a toy gun on their head during a demonstration in the Arab neighbourhood of Silwan on Friday. Some 200 women marched against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that entered on Friday in its 25th year. — AFP/UNB photo

Syria warns all-out war with Israel

JERUSALEM, June 6: Israel's unusually prolonged wave of bombing raids in south Lebanon has prompted Syria to warn that all-out war could occur, but Israeli officials say they will not let it come to that, reports AP.

Twenty-five people have been killed in the 17-day-old bout of violence in south Lebanon, Lebanese police said Friday.

The violence is rooted in a complex military lineup in south Lebanon.

Israel controls a strip of south Lebanese territory through its Christian militia ally, the South Lebanon Army, or SLA. This so-called "security zone" is meant to keep Israel's northern towns and villages out of range of Arab fire.

Pitted against the Israelis are the Iranian-backed Shi'ite fundamentalists of Hezbollah, as well as Palestinian guerrillas and a Syrian force.

Because of the Syrian presence, any Israeli attack on Lebanon carries the potential for escalation.

During an air raid Sunday, Syrian anti-aircraft batteries reportedly opened fire for the first time in a decade.

The latest fighting began May 19, when Hezbollah fighters overran a South Lebanon Army position in the security zone.

The fear in Israel is that the Hezbollah is trying to destroy the SLA, which is the major buffer for Israel," said Gerald Steinberg, a Middle East expert at Bar Ilan University.

The Palestinians also pose a threat.

The army said Friday's bombing target was a base used by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, headed by Ahmed Jibril.

Jibril's group claimed responsibility for an ambush May 27 in south Lebanon that killed an Israeli soldier. The Israelis attacked another base belonging to the guerilla group on Thursday.

With an election coming June 23, the Israeli government cannot afford to be seen as soft on Hezbollah or the Palestinians. But Yossi Olmert, head of the Government Press Office, denied the election was a factor.

"We want to stabilize the situation in south Lebanon," he said. "What is happening there is the opposite of what we are saying in our campaign; that we are bringing security to Israel."

"It is not in our interest to undermine our interests by escalating things in Lebanon," he said in an interview.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir hinted the United States had asked Israel to halt the attacks in south Lebanon.

"Everyone understands the American interest in keeping the region quiet, and in preventing additional conflicts which could hurt the peace process," Shamir was quoted as telling the daily Maariv.

Reuter adds: Israel said on Friday it would ease its two-week-long closure of the occupied Gaza Strip by allowing some Palestinians to work in Israel from Monday.

The Strip, home to 750,000 Palestinians, was sealed after a Gazan killed an Israeli schoolgirl near Tel Aviv.

Yeltsin promises to withdraw troops from Lithuania

MOSCOW, June 6: President Boris Yeltsin has promised to speed up negotiations on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Lithuania, President Vytautas Landsbergis said on Friday, reports Reuter.

He told reporters after an hour-long meeting in the Kremlin that they had agreed on several issues, including Russian oil supplies to the Baltic Republic in the second half of 1992.

The presence of an estimated 38,000 Soviet troops is the main cause of discord between Lithuania and Russia, which has taken over responsibility for the soldiers.

Landsbergis said Yeltsin had agreed with him virtually no progress had been made on the subject since the two men discussed it in January and had promised to press ahead with drawing up a specific schedule. Itar-Tass news agency said.

"We shall continue to discuss the question of troops withdrawal in future," it quoted Landsbergis as saying.

Lithuania, which won independence last September after half a century of rule from Moscow, has been demanding that the Kremlin agree to a timetable.

Lithuanians vote on June 14 in a referendum on whether to demand a complete pullout by the end of 1992.

Moscow says it has nowhere to house its men and that it cannot even start a troops withdrawal before 1994.

Lithuanian officials last week accused Russia of planning to send 15,000 fresh conscripts to the republic.

Moscow Television, quoting official Lithuanian sources, said Vilnius was now proposing that the professional officer corps could stay until 1994, but no new rank and file troops should be sent.

Landsbergis said he was delighted with his meeting with Yeltsin, describing it as friendly and practical.

"We reached straight forward, principled decisions and agreement soon a series of questions," Tass quoted him as saying.

Ramos overtakes Santiago

MANILA, June 6: Apparent winner Fidel Ramos overtook anti-corruption crusader Miriam Defensor Santiago on Saturday in the official congressional tally from last month's presidential election, reports AP.

With 49.74 per cent of the estimated 25 million votes counted, Ramos had 2,444,459 votes against Mrs. Santiago's 2,393,932, or a lead of more than 50,000. Third was businessman Eduardo Cojuangco with 1,854,272.

Ramos was the apparent winner of the May 11 national elections, although Congress is still certifying the results. Official but uncertified figures show Ramos won a plurality of about 23 per cent of the votes in the seven member race.

NACC FMs sign agreement to slash arms in Europe

OSLO, June 6: NATO and its former Warsaw pact foes on Friday signed a long-delayed arms agreement that marks the first concrete result of their new partnership in the post-cold war era, reports Reuter.

Foreign Ministers of the new North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) signed a protocol ironing out problems with a major treaty that slashes tanks and other military hardware in Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals.

"This is one of the most important cornerstones of a future European security architecture," NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner told a news conference.

The Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty, signed with much fanfare in Paris nearly two years ago, has been stalled by the collapse of the Soviet Union and bickering among its successor states over the shareout of Moscow's allocation of equipment.

The Commonwealth of Independent States, under heavy pressure from NATO, finally sorted out the dispute at a summit in Tashkent last month, allowing the protocol to be signed by what are now 29 countries.

The ministers signed the document in a hotel conference room during a meeting of the NACC, which was set up by NATO last December to offer the former Warsaw Pact states aid and advice without giving them full membership of the western alliance.

Although CFE was negotiated before the cold war ended, it is still seen as important because it reduces armaments at a time when new local conflicts are erupting in Europe and locks the countries concerned into a legally-binding agreement.

NATO hopes all signatories will now ratify the treaty in time for a summit of the 52-nation Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) next month, after which they have some four years to carry out the cuts.

But German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel said his Belarus counterpart Pyotr Kravchenko told him his country would probably not be able to ratify the treaty in time because of conservative opposition.

Woerner and US Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger confirmed there were problems for Belarus, but both said this would not sabotage the treaty.

The membership of NACC includes all the ex-Soviet republics, whose internal disputes were quick to surface on Friday, especially the four-year-old conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan in a statement criticised NACC apparently because its communique failed to name Armenia for what Baku says are violations of Azeri territory.

The communique instead called on all parties to the shooting and allow the CSCE to send civilian observers to the embattled Transcaucasus region.

But Azeri Foreign Minister Tofik Gasmov told Reuters Baku would not let in observers until Armenia withdrew.

The dispute between the Baltic states and Russia over withdrawal of ex-Soviet troops from their territory emerged as another point of conflict.

Latvian Foreign Minister Janis Jurkans expressed disappointment that the communique had only called for "the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Baltic states" and had not demanded that this should take place rapidly.

Woerner said he hoped NATO allies would offer financial or technical help in solving the problem.

The communique deplored fighting in former Yugoslavia and held Serbia, Montenegro and the federal army largely to blame.

It also called for increased peace-keeping powers for the CSCE, but went no further than saying NACC noted with interest Thursday's offer by NATO to make its resources available to the CSCE for the purpose.

Eagleburger went further in his speech to the meeting and urged the former Warsaw Pact states to take the "dramatic" step of joining in the peace-keeping efforts.

The NACC admitted Albania, which pulled out of the Warsaw Pact in 1968 and remained in Stalinist isolation until communism collapsed there at the end of the 1980s, as its 37th member.

Not all NACC members are involved in the CFE treaty. Moreover, four central Asian former Soviet republics did not come to the "cooperation council" meeting.

'Dad, he is going to kill me'

SALT LAKE CITY: In an unfinished letter, Anja White wrote before she was fatally shot, she begged her father for help, reports AP.

If he failed to intercede between her and her brother, she wrote, "One day you are going to come home and find one of us dead." But John White didn't see the letter before his 15-year-old daughter was found shot eight times in her bedroom January 9. His son 19-year-old, Ed, was arrested and charged with criminal homicide.

"I'm sure it would have been a flag to me and I would have been aware there were some serious problems," White said Friday.

It wasn't until Thursday night, when he heard the letter read on local television news, that the 47-year-old salesman knew his daughter's last, fearful thoughts.

"They (prosecutors) wouldn't allow us to see it. I requested it several times. Their reason was I was a potential witness," he said. "As victims, I don't feel we've gotten any consideration."

The unsigned letter, found in Anja's bedroom by police, is addressed to "Dad." It warned that if White weren't forced to leave, he would carry out "his threats that he's going to kill me."

She also wrote that her brother had said, "I'm going to kill my whole family. I'm going to kill them all and live off the insurance."

No more war peace forever

LUBANGO, Angola: Pope John Paul II visited two cities in the heart of the killing fields of the Angolan war Friday, pleading for more international aid to rebuild the country, reports AP.

During a morning mass at Huambo, at a site used for summary executions by the Marxist government and its Cuban allies, John Paul blessed amputees injured by exploding mines and cried out to a subdued crowd of 150,000: "No more war! Peace to Angola! Peace forever!"

In the afternoon he outlined the virtues of the family at a ceremony in Lubango, the once-fertile bread basket of Angola that was used as a farming raid launchpad during the 16-year-long civil war.

United Nations troops monitoring the yearlong truce between the formerly Marxist government and the US-backed UNITA rebel movement greeted the pontiff in both places.

In Huambo, where buildings are still pockmarked by machine-gun fire and Soviet-built tanks and helicopters lie charred in the middle of the brush, John Paul acknowledged that the international community was helping put the country back on its feet. But he said more help was needed especially by those "who pushed the country towards strife."

She conceives to provide a lifesaving transplant

REDLANDS, Calif.: Anissa Ayala shared her wedding day with the little sister who made it possible, Marissa Eve Ayala, conceived to provide a lifesaving bone marrow transplant for her, reports AP.

She chose 2 1/2-year-old Marissa as flower girl for her marriage to Bryan Espinosa, 25, at a Victorian mansion in Redlands, about 60 miles (100 kilometres) southeast of Los Angeles, on Friday afternoon.

On June 4, 1991, Miss Ayala received the transplant that's helping her beat leukemia. Parents Abe and Mary Ayala had conceived Marissa after the search for a donor failed.

"Four years ago, things looked so gloomy, and now Anissa's doing great," Abe Ayala said on the eve of the wedding. "We're being so rewarded. It's amazing."

Marissa is "such a little angel. We couldn't ask for any child more beautiful. She's a miracle," he said. "And Anissa always said the baby would be there to carry on for her, if she passed away."

The guest list of 350 included the bride's physician, Rudolf Brutoco.

A recent checkup of Miss Ayala, 20, showed "no trace of any leukemia," said Brutoco.

"When you see (Marissa) walking down the aisle as flower girl, you have to realise that either girl wouldn't be here without the other," he said.

Ayala, 48, and his 45-year-old wife beat tremendous odds when they decided to have a child to provide a bone marrow match for their daughter. The couple also has a son, 21-year-old Alton.

Ayala underwent a vasectomy reversal and Mrs. Ayala faced the difficulties of conceiving in her 40s, and the couple had Marissa in April 1990. The baby proved to be a perfect donor match for her sister.

