

## Afghan peace talks enter a crucial phase

ISLAMABAD, Mar 3: The Pakistan-sponsored Afghan peace talks entered a crucial phase here today as officials reported considerable progress after two days of indirect negotiations between rival groups, reports AFP.

Iranian Vice Foreign Minister Alauddin Brujerdi and Saudi Arabia's intelligence chief Prince Turki Al-Faisal arrived Tuesday to assist in the talks aimed at ending fighting in Kabul and establishing a broad-based government in war-torn Afghanistan.

Foreign Secretary Shaharyar Mohammed Khan, who reported "considerable advance" on some basic issues Tuesday, said he hoped there would be more movement as the talks resume.

But sources here said that hardline Pashtun leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar remained adamantly opposed to President Burhanuddin Rabbani continuing in office after being elected in December to a two-

year term by a controversial gathering of representatives from across the country.

Hekmatyar, whose Hezb-i-Islami faction is allied with several other Mujahideen groups opposed to the government, has demanded a new mechanism to elect a new administration and allocate key cabinet portfolios such as Defence and Foreign Affairs.

They oppose are also insisting power being shared between the president and prime minister and that no party should be given more than one cabinet post.

AP adds: Hekmatyar has been blamed for much of the destruction in Kabul, where thousands have been killed or wounded in rocket attacks by his forces since April. Hundreds of thousands have fled the city.

Pakistani officials, who are mediating, met in the morning with representatives of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani's government.

# Ghali wants UN troops to enforce peace in Bosnia

LONDON, Mar 3: United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali made it clear today that he was now willing to use UN forces to enforce a peace settlement in the war-torn republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina — a U-turn in policy, reports AFP.

"In Yugoslavia, like in Somalia, you may have certain gangs who are not under the control of the leaders who have accepted, and here you will be compelled to use force if you want to give the minimum of credibility to your plan or your peace process," Ghali told the Times in an interview.

His new position contrasts strongly with the warning he gave only months ago that the former Yugoslavia could become the "Vietnam" of the UN. "For the sake of peace, you have to accept risk," he told

the newspaper from his New York headquarters.

"I will not say I have changed, but the situation has changed," he said. "We have been involved in so many operations that it would be difficult to say now that I don't want to be involved in this one."

The Secretary-General made it clear that he personally wanted UN troops to be empowered to use force in Bosnia to put into effect any peace accord — which other UN officials say could involve the deployment of some 60,000 troops — was still in progress, he said.

If the peace agreement eventually collapsed and UN troops became embroiled in fighting on the ground, it would be up to the (UN) Security Council, and particularly the stronger members, to

decide what to do about it.

"The troops are not under my command, they are under the command of the Security Council. I am just a middle-man between the Council and the command."

"What is more important, and everyone seems to forget this, is that the Security Council is Great Britain, is France, is (the) United States, is Russia."

"They are the international community. They have decided, they have accepted, they have sent the troops, they are their own troops. The UN depends on the will of the major countries."

With the resumption of the Bosnian peace talks — chaired by EC negotiator Lord Owen and UN Envoy Cyrus Vance — in New York this week, Ghali said he believed a settlement

was in sight.

"There is a fatigue. They understand that it is in their interest to find a solution. The sooner they have a solution, the better will be the situation; and, according to the reports I have received, there is progress."

"They are more willing to find a solution than before. Things have changed to give us a minimum of hope."

Ghali made it clear that he would tell the Security Council not to become involved militarily in Bosnia if the Muslim-led government and the minority Serbs failed to join the Croats in signing a peace accord.

The annual cost of UN peacekeeping is currently around 2.1 billion pounds (3 billion dollars) — three times the organisation's normal budget.

## Off the Record

### At last he gets uncontested divorce decree

LONDON: Salman Rushdie, in hiding from an Iranian death threat, received an uncontested divorce decree on Tuesday after more than two years' separation from American writer Marianne Wiggins, reports AP.



Rushdie, 45, plans to remarry soon, sources close to the writer said last month. His future wife was reported to be a poet, but Scotland Yard asked that her name not be released for reasons of security.

Rushdie and Ms. Wiggins, who were married in 1988, separated in July 1989, five months after Iran accused Rushdie of blaspheming Islam with his book, "The Satanic Verses" and called for his death.

The couple went into hiding after Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini condemned Rushdie on February 14, 1989. They separated the following July, Ms. Wiggins has said.

Ms. Wiggins, 45, lives in New York. Rushdie remains in hiding under police protection, occasionally emerging briefly for an unannounced public appearance.

Rushdie, who has a 14-year-old son from a previous marriage, petitioned for divorce on the basis of more than two years' separation.

### Now it's up to us

LOS ANGELES: Simon and Garfunkel played such hits as "Sounds of Silence" and "Bridge Over Troubled Water" in a benefit that raised 1 million dollars for the Los Angeles Children's Health Project, reports AP.

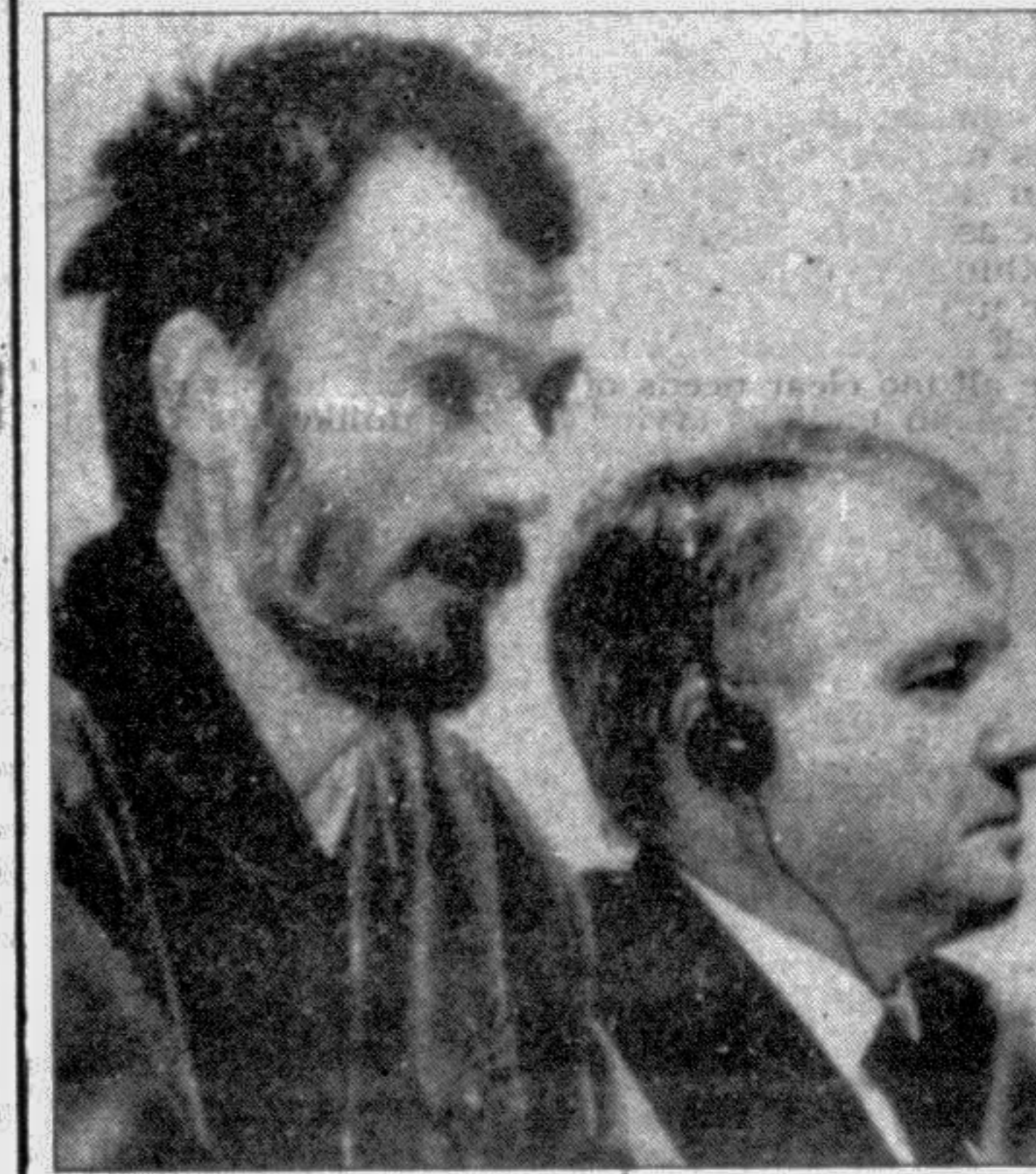
Neil Young also performed Monday night, and Steve Martin offered comedy between sets. Celebrities in the audience included Jack Nicholson, Alec Baldwin, Kim Basinger and David Crosby.

Tickets cost 100 dollar to 500 dollar. "You've done your part — now it's up to us," Paul Simon told the crowd as he introduced Young, who opened the show at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

Simon and Art Garfunkel — in a rare reunion performance joined Young to sing "Helpless," blending their smooth harmonies with Young's thin, haunting voice. Young sat in on "Sounds of Silence."

The Children's Health Project is a traveling programme for homeless youngsters already established in several other cities. It was organized by The Children's Health Fund, created in 1987 by Simon and a doctor.

Simon and Garfunkel broke up over personal and professional differences shortly after winning a Grammy in 1970 for "Bridge Over Troubled Water." They reunited in 1980 for a concert in New York's Central Park and again in 1983.



SPAIN: French Scientist Luc Montaigner (R) who first discovered the HIV-virus, is accompanied by AIDS victim Jon Salaberria (L), as he officially opens the 2nd National AIDS congress in Bilbao on Tuesday. — AFP/UNB photo

## BRIEFLY

**Choi ROK ruling party secy:** South Korea's new president, Kim Young-Sam, today named his right-hand man Choi Hyung-Woo to the key post of Secretary-General of the ruling party, a party spokesman announced, AFP reports from Seoul.

Choi's nomination was taken as an indication Kim intended to closely control the ruling Democratic Liberal Party (DLP), although it is dominated by political followers of former President Roh Tae-Woo, onetime general who stepped down last week, political insiders said.

Choi, 58, was a close aide to Kim for over two decades while Kim was an opposition party leader before his joining the ruling party in 1990.

Choi's predecessor, Kim Yung-Koo, 53, who belongs to the Roh faction within the party, was named party floor leader. Another Roh follower, Kim Jong-Ho, 58, who served as the Home Minister under the authoritarian President Chun Doo-Hwan, was appointed party policy committee chairman.

**UNTAC opens radio:** The UN peacekeeping force in Cambodia opened up its radio broadcasting facilities on Wednesday to all 20 political parties registered to run in May election, Reuter reports from Phnom Penh.

Under the "equal access, equal time" project, each political party will be allotted two five-minute slots per week on radio UNTAC (UN transitional authority in Cambodia), UNTAC spokesman Eric Falt said.

The parties can either pre-record their statements or use UN studios, which each day will air total of 40 minutes of political statements by eight of the parties, he said. There are plans to expand the project to television.

The radically leftist Khmer Rouge guerrillas, who have turned their backs on a peace pact that formally ended 13 years of civil war, will be absent from the airwaves because of their failure to register a party.

**Peru to grant ICRC access:** Peru will grant the International Committee of the Red Cross full access to prisons and facilitate the work of international human rights groups who visit the country, Prime Minister Oscar De la Puente said on Tuesday, reports Reuter from Lima.

He told reporters the government would work with Peru's rights umbrella group, the national coordinator of human rights, to assure that rights are fully respected in Peru.

The rights issue has taken centre stage here since the approval of an IMF accord was held up last week due to US concerns over Peru's human rights record.

**French FM in Moscow:** French Foreign Minister Ronald Dumas arrived in Moscow Tuesday for a few hours' visit that precedes an official trip in Russia by French President Francois Mitterrand, reports AFP from Moscow.

Dumas was to meet with Russian officials to discuss relations between the two countries, the situation in former Yugoslavia and the conflict in the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh.

**23 killed in Filipino clash:** The army said on Tuesday that 23 people were killed and at least 20 others wounded in fighting with communist rebels in the northern Philippines over the weekend, Reuter reports from Manila.

Army Chief Lieutenant-General Arturo Enrile said in a report 19 of those killed in separate clashes in two provinces were guerrillas.

One rebel was killed in fighting in Joves, Isabela Province. The army claims 10 rebels wounded in that clash died later because they lacked medical care but this could not be independently confirmed.

Six more rebels and three soldiers were slain in another gunbattle in San Guillermo in the same province. Two rebels died in a clash in nearby Cagayan Province.

**Algerian police kill nine:** Nine suspected Islamic fundamentalist militants were killed Tuesday by a police patrol in Damous, 70 kilometers (45 miles) west of here, after a high-speed chase, officials said, reports AFP from Algiers.

The gunmen, riding in a small truck, took off in a hail of gunfire when they sighted the police, the officials said, adding that the police eventually cornered the men forcing them to abandon their truck, and killed them in an ensuing shootout.

The police recovered arms, grenades, and ammunition in the operation, they said. It was the first clash between security forces and fundamentalists since the start of the Muslim fasting month of Ramzan on February 23.

## India still committed to SAARC

NEW DELHI, Mar 3: Indian Minister of External Affairs Dinesh Singh said that India and China should play a common role in establishing the new world order, reports Xinhua.

During a meeting with Liu Shuqing, President of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs Tuesday, the Indian minister said that India and China, the two largest developing countries in the world, should strengthen their cooperation in this regard.

The Indian minister also said that India remains committed to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation which groups India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives.

Liu Shuqing, who is on a week-long visit to India, said that the new world order should be based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence initiated by China and India in the 1950s.

The Indian minister expressed the hope that Indo-China relations will be further improved and trading ties between the two countries will be enhanced.



ISRAEL: Palestinian workers return to the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, after the area was sealed. The action comes after a Gaza resident went on a rampage on Monday in Tel Aviv and stabbed to death two Israelis. Seven others were injured in the attack in Israel for almost a year. — AFP/UNB photo

## Iran refutes western allegations

TEHRAN, Mar 3: Iran on Tuesday denied western allegations it sought to acquire nuclear weapons and said the accusations were a pretext for arming Iran's neighbours, reports AFP.

"Access and use of nuclear weapons is not part of Iran's defence strategy," Defence Minister Akbar Torkan said in an interview with the state-run IRNA news agency, echoing remarks made previously by other Iranian officials.

Iran was 'trying to maintain and preserve the existing weapons in the country and we don't need to purchase new weapons,' he said.

"Our power is in the faith and boldness of our youth," said Torkan.

He charged that western countries had "transferred more than 30 million tonnes of weaponry to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, occupied Palestine [Israel] and other regional countries," during the Gulf War.

"A large amount of these weapons have remained in the region... and he West is trying to sell them to the regional countries through wide-scale propaganda," Torkan said.

He said allegations that Iran was trying to obtain nuclear weapons was part of this propaganda.

# US had contacts with Hamas

WASHINGTON, Mar 3: The Clinton administration confirmed on Tuesday it had maintained "a variety of contacts" with the Muslim fundamentalist group Hamas, which the State Department is linking with terrorism in an upcoming report, reports AP.

The contacts by US diplomats in the Middle East "go back some time," Richard A. Boucher, the State Department spokesman, said, and dealt with developments in the Islamic world.

Responding to reporters' questions, he said the US

Embassy in Jordan had been instructed "not to continue those contacts." Boucher said he did not know the reason.

It was learned, meanwhile, US diplomats in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv had also been in touch with Hamas, which takes responsibility for a number of bloody attacks on Israel.

Israel responded to the violence in December by deporting 415 Palestinians suspected of links to Hamas to Lebanon. A few were repatriated as having been misidentified.

A total of 396 remain in tents, their detention cited by

Palestinian negotiators as their reason for resisting US efforts to reopen a Mideast peace conference in Washington in April.

Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher and Russian Foreign Minister Andrei V. Kozyrev announced last week in Geneva, Switzerland, invitations would be issued anyhow. The other participants in the negotiations are Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

In a report on terrorism due April 1 the State Department discusses a number of terrorist acts committed

by Hamas in 1992, officials said. "This group's violent activities increased dramatically during 1992 and the group used increasingly lethal tactics, such as roadside explosives and car bombs," the Office to Counter-Terrorism said.

Hamas was formed in 1988 and its activities did not warrant discussion until they increased dramatically both in number and sophistication last year, the office said.

Boucher explained the contacts this way.

## Mitterrand will propose to curb president's power

PARIS, Mar 3: President Francois Mitterrand said Tuesday that constitutional reforms he will propose to the cabinet March 10 will include curbs on presidential authority to invoke emergency powers, reports AP.

Mitterrand told French media that he will ask that Article 16 of the constitution be stricken. It gives the president exceptional powers during a national emergency.

"I preferred a pure and simple striking of this article, rather than a new version," Mitterrand told French jour-

nalists.

Mitterrand's disclosure marked the first significant glimpse of a constitutional reform process the president set in motion last fall in a bid to revive his sagging popularity. He said intended to give parliament more powers and trim executive authority.

The Fifth Republic constitution in force since de Gaulle's return to power in 1958 gives the president some of the strongest powers in a Western democracy.

The president serves a seven-year term, appoints and

fires prime ministers, controls foreign and defense policy, and can dissolve parliament at will and call fresh elections.

Under Article 16, the president, after consultations with the prime minister and leaders of the National Assembly and Senate, may invoke dictatorial powers if the nation faces an immediate internal or foreign threat.

The proposal to strike the article drew immediate criticism from Alain Juppe, secretary-general of the Rally for the Republic party that is de Gaulle's heir.

## Iraq, Libya to strengthen ties

BAGHDAD, Mar 3: Libya and Iraq, both under UN sanctions, expressed their desire to strengthen ties during a visit to Tripoli by an Iraqi envoy, the official Iraqi News Agency (INA) reported Tuesday, says AFP.

Brazan Ibrahim Al-Takriti, political adviser to President Saddam Hussein and his half brother, met Tuesday with Libya's Foreign Minister, Omar Al-Montasser, INA said.

The envoy arrived in Tripoli on Monday by road from Tunis, where he gave Tunisian President Zine-el-Abidine Ben Ali a message from Saddam Hussein. Its contents were not revealed.

## Clinton a man of peace: Castro

HAVANA (Cuba), Mar 3: Cuban President Fidel Castro said on Monday night he had the impression US President Bill Clinton was "a man of peace" and "could have some ethics," reports Reuter.

Since Clinton's election victory last November Castro and Cuba's communist government have been cautious in their public statements about the new US leader, appearing to adopt a wait-and-see policy towards him.

In a Cuban television interview, Castro said he had been struck by a statement by

Clinton that he would never authorise a plan to assassinate Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

"It seemed to me an ethical thing to say. I got that impression," the Cuban leader said. "He could have some ethics," he went on, adding he had the impression Clinton was also "a man of peace."

Castro said that although successive US Presidents represented an imperial power, they had had different styles. He cited the case of Jimmy Carter, saying he had displayed "ethical behaviour."

## Suharto, Try fit, able to run Indonesia

JAKARTA, Mar 3: A medical team has declared Indonesian President Suharto and former military chief Try Sutrisno, a nominee for the vice presidency, both fit and able to lead the country for the next five years, a press report said Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Jakarta Post said the presidential medical team has sent a letter to the National Assembly stating that after examinations, the team could state that Suharto and Try were emotionally and physically healthy and able to serve as president and vice president for the next five years.

Suharto, 71, is almost certain to be re-elected to a sixth consecutive five-year term of office by the National Assembly next Wednesday.

# \$2 lakh reward for clues in World Trade Centre bombing

NEW YORK, Mar 3: Authorities offered a 200,000 dollar reward Tuesday for clues in the World Trade Centre bombing and officials said they were investigating the possible involvement of Palestinian extremists and other terrorist organisations, reports AFP.

New York Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly said investigators were trying to learn if there was a link between Friday's bombing and a January 22 telephone threat to the US embassy in Algeria warning of a bombing in New York if some 400 Palestinians deported by Israel in December were not allowed to return.

A second threat was received January 26, Kelly said, adding that such calls are not uncommon. The call was placed by someone claiming to represent the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Kelly said.

Asked about the Muslim fundamentalist group Hamas, the head of the FBI's New York office, James Fox, said, "that's a group with a known propensity for vio-

lence. That's a group we're looking at, one of several groups.

The port authority, owner of the landmark 110-story twin towers, matched a reward by the city, bringing the total to 200,000 dollars for information leading to convictions in the bombing, which killed at least five people and injured more than 1,000.

Mayor David Dinkins appealed to witnesses to come forward. "It is critical that anyone with information of this heinous act come forward," Dinkins said. "We cannot and will not submit to those forces who wish to panic our city."

According to the FBI, there are about 1,000 possible witnesses to some element of the attack, including garage employees and customers and workers at a car rental agency.

One man believed lost in the explosion resurfaced Tuesday, but one other person was still missing.

Cable News Network reported that investigators were focusing on a brown van with a red stripe that might have held the bomb. The FBI declined to comment on the report.

Fox said agents hoped to obtain surveillance cameras buried in the rubble of the blast that could provide more clues.

Videotapes already in the possession of authorities were of "marginal quality," he said, adding that tapes from additional cameras could provide a real breakthrough.

The tapes, which may be enhanced by computer, could provide authorities with license plate numbers of vehicles entering or leaving the underground garage where the explosion occurred, fox said.

In examining the tapes, investigators are zeroing in on images of low-riding vehicles, which may indicate they were carrying heavy loads.

The explosion blew through six floors underpinning one of the World Trade Center's towers, the world's second

largest buildings, sending smoke through the towers and causing a panicked evacuation through dark, smoke-filled stairwells.

Thirty-four of the estimated 1,000 injured remained hospitalised Tuesday. The towers have been closed because of damage to communications and other systems, and may reopen later this month.

Investigators are wary of the danger of falling chunks of concrete. A section of a wall tumbled down near two police officers Monday. Police are using a robot to look for cameras, and dogs and thermal imaging equipment were being used to hunt for other evidence.

Commodities brokers and major businesses in the center's twin Towers have relocated their operations and were functioning close to normal early Tuesday, a center spokesman said.

Families of the five victims buried their dead Tuesday and city officials announced plans for a "small and symbolic" memorial service at the site.

## \$20m UN appeal for Georgia

UNITED NATIONS, Mar 3: The United Nations launched a 20 million dollars appeal on Tuesday for the former Soviet republic of Georgia, where it said 100,000 people were in urgent need of food and other aid because of internal strife, reports Reuter.

Georgian forces have been fighting separatists in the Abkhazia and Adzharia regions and have accused Russian troops still stationed in those Black Sea provinces of supplying the rebels with weapons. Moscow has denied this.

A mission including representatives of various UN agencies visited Georgia from January 30 to February 16 to assess emergency needs.