

Hungry crowd mobs food centre Afghan factions trade rocket fires in Kabul

KABUL, Mar 7: Hundreds of hungry Afghans scaled a wall and mobbed a mosque Monday that was holding United Nations food stocks, delaying distribution by yet another day, reports AP.

Also, warring Islamic factions exchanged rocket fire in the hard-hit southern and eastern parts of the city. Hospitals reported 60 wounded and one dead, but the actual toll was believed much higher.

UN trucks with wheat flour arrived in Kabul late Sunday, the first UN food supplies to reach the besieged capital since a major battle erupted January 1.

Aid groups planned to hand out the food Monday, but when word spread that the supplies were at the Parwan Mosque compound, the place was immediately mobbed.

Hundreds of people climbed over a five-foot (one-and-a-half-meter) wall and tried to get to the bags of wheat.

"It's chaos. There's nothing we can do in a situation like this," said Mohammed Ayub, who works for CARE International, a US aid group.

Guards with automatic rifles dispersed the crowd, though many were furious at being turned back.

"I haven't eaten for two days," said a woman who gave

her name only as Sanya.

Ayub said the food would be moved to a more secure site and distributed Tuesday. He said some food already at other locations around the city might be handed out Monday.

The fighting between President Burhanuddin Rabbani's forces and Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's faction has left much of the city in ruins and created a worsening food crisis.

There have been no reports of starvation, but Monday's incident illustrated how desperate conditions have become. Tens of thousands of people are reliant on food handouts which are almost exhausted, aid groups say.

However, Hekmatyar, who controls the outskirts of the capital, says he will not permit any more supplies to enter Kabul.

His forces stopped the UN trucks for several days before they were allowed to pass Sunday. The renegade prime minister said he relented this time only because UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali made a personal plea in a letter.

Hekmatyar and his ally, warlord Rashid Dostum, have been unable to gain any ground despite their ferocious assault on Kabul, which has left about 1,000 dead and some 12,000 wounded.

Muslims, Croat forces begin withdrawing heavy guns



Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic answers journalists' questions after meeting with UN Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi at Presidential Palace in Sarajevo, March 6. Izetbegovic said he expected Tuzla airport in the north and access roads to the Bosnian capital to open "very soon." — AFP photo

SARAJEVO, Mar 7: Croat and Muslim forces have begun withdrawing their heavy guns from front lines as part of moves aimed at ending Bosnia's three-cornered civil war, reports Reuter.

Under a ceasefire agreement worked out last month, military commanders of the two sides set a Monday noon (1300 GMT) deadline to pull out heavy weapons or place them under UN control.

On several fronts, witnesses said the withdrawal began a day early. Military hardware removed from lines that have seen bitter fighting for the better part of a year ranged from two Muslim T-55 tanks to a Croat Howitzer manufactured in 1942.

The truce agreement, which sharply reduced the level of fighting on most Croat-Muslim fronts, was followed by a US brokered deal to form a federation of ethnically-based cantons in Bosnia and then join them to Croatia in a loose confederation.

The Serbs, the most powerful military force in the war, were not invited to Washington or to US sponsored Croat-Muslim talks which opened in Vienna on Friday to fill in the details of the framework agreement reached in Washington.

US President Bill Clinton's special envoy to the federation

talks, Charles Redman, said over the weekend he hoped the Serbs would soon join discussions on an overall settlement.

Redman is scheduled to travel from Vienna to Belgrade this week to draw the Serbs into the process.

Muslims and Croats fought together against Serbs when the Bosnian war erupted in April, 1992. But that alliance broke apart early in 1993 and the Bosnian conflict turned into a three-cornered scramble for territory.

The Serbs now hold more than 70 per cent of the country and would have to cede territory under the federation plans now under discussion.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic said he would send a government delegation to Moscow soon to try to persuade Russia, long sympathetic to the Serb cause, to put pressure on Bosnian Serbs.

Despite peace offensives on several fronts after months of diplomatic stagnation, problems on the ground have left no doubt that the road to peace will be long and arduous.

AP adds: Sarajevo's truce is not welcomed by all residents. Thousands of the capital's defenders with family in the city are being deployed elsewhere, resulting in a rash of tearful good-byes.

Off the Record



Evi (L) and Derby from Oman are dressed in traditional outfits as they represent their country at the Berlin International Tourism Fair in Germany March 6, where 5,063 exhibitors from 167 countries are currently encouraging potential travellers. — AFP photo

Serial killer in jail gets \$12000 from pen pals

MIALWAUKEE, Wisconsin: Jeffrey Dahmer, who admitted to killing and dismembering 17 men and boys, has received more than 12,000 dollars from pen pals since being jailed, reports AP.

Prison records show that the 33-year-old has received cash from letter writers across the United States, as well as Britain, South Africa and France.

The gifts include 350 dollars from a woman who said she hoped to teach the convicted killer about Jesus and 50 dollars from another woman who suggested Dahmer use the funds for cigarettes and stamps.

A London woman weighed in last year with a 5,920 dollar donation for Dahmer, and a 70-year-old nun sent him 10 dollars for reimbursement postage on a pair of art books he mailed her.

"He did awful things but way deep down he isn't a mean kid," she said.

Lesbian mother abuses daughter

LLEXINGTON: Donna loves Shirley. That fact, the women claim, is the source of accusations that they sexually abused a 2 1/2-year-old child, reports AP.

"I would not go through what I have gone through and continue to go through if I did not love her," said Donna Madren, who, along with Shirley Edwards, is charged with abusing Edwards' daughter.

The women, accused of kissing the child's genitals, face first-degree sex offence charges, which carry a maximum penalty of life of prison. They are also charged with hitting the girl and biting her on the leg.

A judge was scheduled to decide today if the case should be sent to a grand jury or dismissed.

Madren, 34, and Edwards, 26, deny the charges. They claim the accusations stem from an attempt by Edwards' mother to gain custody of the girl.

Madren said the trouble began last fall when Edwards told her mother, Elaine Vanzant, that she is a lesbian.

Edwards' homosexuality is being used as a weapon "to get custody of the child, in my opinion," said her lawyer, Jeffrey Koenig. "It's pretty dirty tactics."

Vanzant, however, said her daughter's sexual orientation is irrelevant. She does not dislike gays or lesbians, she said.

Rafsanjani calls for Asian alliance

NICOSIA, Mar 7: Iran's president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, on Sunday called for Iran, Pakistan, India and China to pool resources and forge a powerful alliance in Asia, Tehran radio reported, says AP.

"Iran believes that Asian countries, including China, India, Iran and Pakistan can pool their vast means and material and human resources to forge a powerful alliance," Rafsanjani said in a meeting in Tehran with India's foreign minister, Dinesh Singh.

Turkish troops ready to leave for Bosnia

ISTANBUL, Mar 7: Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller said here yesterday that a Turkish battalion was ready to go to Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports Xinhua.

There is no further development yet. Talks are continuing. Our preparations are already completed, Ciller told reporters here.

Dogu Silahcioglu, spokesman for the chief of general staff, confirmed that the Turkish army was ready to send its troops to Bosnia.

US, UK, Norway back proposal to deploy int'l troops in WB, Gaza

CAIRO, Mar 7: A top PLO official said Sunday the United States, Britain and Norway support a proposal to deploy international troops in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reports AP.

Nabil Shaath, negotiator for the Palestine Liberation Organisation who returned from a visit to the three countries, said they all agreed in principle to "the necessity of reining in the terroristic settlement groups and the Israeli army too."

Shaath arrived in Cairo a few hours after PLO chairman Yasser Arafat, who consulted with Egyptian officials on ways to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace talks that were suspended after the February 25 Hebron mosque massacre.

Both men met late into the night with Egypt's Foreign Minister, Amr Moussa. Arafat said afterward he would wait for the UN Security Council to express itself on the situation in the occupied territories before making a commitment to return to the peace talks.

"We insist on complete denunciation of this terrible crime, on international protection for our people and disarming the settlers," Arafat said. "Pulling out the settlers

from the Hebron area is essential because the settlements inside it are dangerous," Hebron has a large Arab majority.

Earlier, the Palestinian leader talked with President Hosni Mubarak on Egypt's efforts to defuse the current crisis, Moussa sat in.

Moussa indicated security for Palestinian residents was a major topic.

"Israel is responsible for the lands under its military occupa-

US navy assigns women to combat ships

WASHINGTON, Mar 7: The Navy today is beginning to assign women to combat ships, ordering 60 women sailors and officers to duty aboard the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D Eisenhower, the service said, reports AP.

The Navy said in a statement Sunday some 500 women will be assigned to the Eisenhower, the first such permanent posting of women aboard a combat ship. Women have been assigned to non-combat ships and have been to temporary duty aboard combat ships in the past.

Arafat, Mubarak talk PLO's dispute with Israel

CAIRO, Mar 7: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak met in Cairo on Sunday on the PLO's dispute with Israel over international protection for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, reports Reuter.

Arafat arrived in the afternoon and first had 30 minutes of talks with Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias, the current president of the European Union council of ministers, who came specially from Damascus for the meeting.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who attended both sets of talks, gave no sign that a solution was close or that PLO-Israeli talks on Palestinian self-rule could resume soon.

"Meetings will continue," he told reporters.

He said he knew nothing about Israeli reports that Foreign Minister Shimon Peres

would see PLO Chairman Arafat in Cairo today.

Arafat is demanding armed international peacekeepers for the West Bank and Gaza Strip to protect Palestinians from Jewish settlers like the one who massacred about 40 people in a Hebron mosque on February 25. Israel has rejected the demand.

The row over the killings has held up the PLO-Israeli negotiations on details of the agreement for limited Palestinian self-rule which they signed last year.

Moussa said: "We are talking about disarming the settler elements, outlawing certain organisations and discussing the question of settlements, which lead to insecurity."

"Security is not a matter for Israelis to care about alone. Arab security, Palestinians security should be equal to Israeli security...from now on, in all talks."



PLO chairman Yasser Arafat (R) meets Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias (L) at Cairo airport March 6 at the arrival of Arafat to Egypt. Papoulias ended a Middle East tour to discuss the peace process in the region. — AFP photo

Ukraine's N-missiles await dismantling in Moscow

MOSCOW, Mar 7: The first batch of Ukrainian nuclear missiles to be dismantled under a US-backed treaty have arrived in Russia in great secrecy, the agency Interfax reported Sunday, quoting Ukrainian military sources, reports AP.

The trainload of 60 missiles could be handled at special factories in Sverdlovsk, Chelyabinsk or Toms in Siberia, according to another agency, ITAR-Tass. The Defence Ministry has mentioned the Sverdlovsk region.

Ukraine, which inherited the world's third-biggest nuclear arsenal from the former Soviet Union, reluctantly agreed to hand all its missiles in for destruction on January 14 in a three-way treaty with Washington and Moscow.

The agreement requires the timetable of missile shipments to remain in complete secrecy, according to a Russian specialist quoted by ITAR-Tass.

Assad urges EU to give new impetus to ME talks

DAMASCUS, Mar 7: Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad called on the European Union on Sunday to give new impetus to the Middle East peace process, during talks here with Greek Foreign Minister Karolos Papoulias, reports AP.

A Syrian presidential spokesman said Assad told Papoulias, whose country currently chairs the EU council of ministers, "Syria supports the peace process despite Israel's lack of seriousness."

Assad called on the EU to "play an active role in advancing the peace process."

The spokesman said Assad stressed he was "virtually convinced that Israel is not serious" about seeking peace.

Talks between Syria and Israel have been deadlocked over conditions for an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Seized by Israel in the 1967 Middle East war.

Papoulias arrived in Damascus Saturday on the last leg of

a regional tour aimed at reviving the Middle East peace talks, suspended since the February 25 Hebron mosque massacre when a Jewish settler gunned down dozens of Muslim worshippers.

He gave Assad a message from Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu "on the peace process and Syrian-Greek relations," the spokesman said, without further explanation.

On Saturday, Papoulias discussed the aftermath of the Hebron massacre with Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq Al-Shara, and cooperation between Syria and the EU.

The Greek minister, accompanied by European commissioner for external relations Hans Van Den Broek, earlier visited Tunisia, Jordan, Israel and Egypt.

Papoulias left Damascus for Cairo Sunday to hold talks with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, the Greek embassy said here.

Militants ambush train in Egypt: 11 injured

ASSIUT, Egypt, Mar 7: Gunmen thought to be Muslim militants ambushed three night trains in southern Egypt this morning, wounding 11 Egyptian passengers, reports Reuter.

The militant Gama's Al-Islamiya has claimed responsibility for two attacks on trains in the past month as part of its campaign to scare foreign tourists out of the country.

Two of the trains attacked today were of the type tourists take for the trip between the capital Cairo and the southern resort towns of Luxor and Assuan.

Passengers said the attacks took place at about 2.30 AM (0030 GMT).

Rabin puts off cabinet vote on uprooting militant Jews

JERUSALEM, Mar 7: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's government sought to revive the stalled Middle East peace talks Sunday but hesitated on a decision to uproot militant Jews from a settlement in the West Bank town of Hebron, reports AP.

A growing number of Cabinet ministers have come out in favour of removing 400 militant settlers living among 80,000 Arabs in the heart of Hebron. In Sunday's Cabinet meeting, at least half the 14 ministers advocated removing the settlers, said Tourism Minister Uzi Baran.

But Rabin refused to allow a vote on the issue and deferred further discussion until next week, Baran said. Rabin opposes dismantling any of the

144 settlements in the occupied territories where some 120,000 Jews live alongside 1.8 million Palestinians.

It would look like we're really accepting the opinion of the PLO," said Agriculture Minister Yaakov Tsur.

Since the massacre of 30 men and boys in a mosque in the West Bank town of Hebron on February 25, the PLO has said it will not return to the talks until Israel removes radical Jewish settlements in Arab towns and permits an international peacekeeping force in the territories.

The Cabinet voted to order the attorney general to charge anyone who praises the mosque massacre with incitement, punishable with several

years in prison.

The killer in the mosque massacre was a Jewish settler, Israel TV showed settlers rejoicing and dancing when they heard about the massacre. Palestinians and moderate Israelis alike were incensed.

The government has already sought to curb militant settlers, ordering the arrest of six leaders and the disarming of 18 others. But there have been widespread calls for tougher action.

There was no immediate response to the Israeli moves from the PLO.

Foreign Minister Shimon Peres is trying to arrange a meeting with PLO chairman Yasser Arafat through Egyptian intermediaries in an effort to revive direct contacts with the

Palestinians.

Peres' spokeswoman, Bahira Budugo said the meeting, possibly this week, would deal with the Palestinians' demands — except for their demands about the settlers. Arafat arrived in Cairo, Egypt, on Sunday for consultations with President Hosni Mubarak about reviving the peace talks.

Later, after meeting into the night with Egypt's Foreign Minister, Amr Moussa, Arafat said he was waiting to commit himself on talking peace again until the UN Security Council expresses itself on the situation in the occupied territories.

"We insist on complete denunciation of this terrible crime, on international protec-

tion for our people and disarming the settlers," Arafat said.

The Security Council has not issued a resolution largely because of a dispute between the PLO and Israel about the wording.

In Hebron, settlers' leaders threatened to resist any attempt to uproot the colony.

"We won't act with violence, but we'll fill the prisons," Meir Indoor, head of Victims Against Terror, was quoted as saying by Israel's Itim news agency. He was referring to a planned civil disobedience campaign.

Former chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren said he gave a religious ruling that ending the Jewish presence in Hebron "requires us to resist it to the death, all

of us, every Jew." But he forbade settlers to fire on soldiers.

Officials said the housing ministry will provide rent subsidies for 30 families from two West Bank settlements, Kiryat Arba and Ariel, who sought help to move back inside Israel.

Amid the heated debate, Rabin faced a threatened walk-out by his left-wing coalition partner, the Meretz Party, which has four ministers in the Cabinet.

Singer Sinatra collapses during concert

RICHMOND, Mar 7: Frank Sinatra collapsed on stage Sunday night during a concert. His condition was not immediately known, reports AP.

"He had one or two songs left to go when he passed out," said Judy Hunsaker, a spokesman for the Richmond Mosque auditorium where the concert was held.

Robert Papke, director of facility services at the Mosque, said the 78-year-old entertainer passed out about 9:40 pm. "He was alert when he left," Papke said.

Audience member Frank Trexler said Sinatra stopped during his rendition of "My Way" and asked for a chair.