



Palestinian schoolgirls hold a poster of Yasser Arafat and chant their support as the Palestinian Authority chairman returned Saturday to Gaza from consultations in Europe and Middle East after the Washington summit. Arafat received a hero's welcome on the eve of talks with Israel, telling the crowd of about 5,000 Palestinians that there was "a new chance for peace," but ruling out any renegotiation. — AFP/UNB photo

Clinton hails opening of ME peace talks at Erez

WASHINGTON, Oct 6: President Bill Clinton hailed the opening of Israeli-Palestinian talks today and urged the parties to achieve tangible results as soon as possible, reports AFP.

"The president welcomes the start today of discussions between the Israeli and Palestinian delegations at Erez, following up on the meetings he held with King Hussein, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Palestinian Authority chairman Yasser Arafat October 1-2," the White House said in a statement.

"These talks are expected to continue until major outstanding issues are resolved. The president calls on the parties to conduct these discussions in a spirit of partnership and goodwill, in order that tangible results be achieved as soon as possible. Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve to fulfill their aspirations for peace, security, and prosperity," the statement said.

Christophor told reporters accompanying him he will meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday morning and with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat later in the day to stress the need for "significant progress" as quickly as possible.

Another official said the Israeli-Palestinian talks set for Sunday at the Israel Gaza border crossing must give the Palestinians "particular

sense that there will be a set of results."

The official said both sides, particularly the Israelis, are approaching the talks with a sense of urgency. The official, asking not to be identified by name, said Netanyahu had even proposed that the talks get underway this past Friday — just two days after the Israeli-Palestinian summit in Washington.

He later agreed that more time was needed for preparation.

Another goal in the talks, the official said, was to develop the kind of trust that existed between the Palestinians and the Israelis when the Labour government was in power in Israel until four months ago.

"They don't have it at all right now," the official said. US mediator Dennis Ross, who will sit in on the talks, will have as one of his primary roles the task of convincing each side that the other is not necessarily motivated by the worst intentions.

"These negotiations are going to have to create some level of trust between the negotiators," the official said. "They are going to have to get a feel for each other."

Reuter adds: Israel said it would lift on Sunday an 11-day old curfew imposed on Palestinians in the West Bank town of Hebron.

Swindler nicknamed 'Netanyahu'

ASSYUT, Egypt, Oct 6: A suspected Egyptian swindler, whom his victims nicknamed 'Netanyahu' after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, has been arrested in southern Egypt, police sources said Saturday, reports AFP.

Mustafa al-Nahhas, a labourer in Assyut, is alleged to have taken passports and large sums of money from about 20 people, saying he could get them work contracts in the Gulf oil monarchies, the sources said.

After several weeks of waiting, Nahha's victims demanded that he return their money and passports, but he only promised to do so 'tomorrow or the day after, without honouring his commitments,' the sources said.

BRIEFLY

Clinton phones UAE president: US President Bill Clinton talked by telephone with United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Zayed bin Sultan al-Nayhan about obstacles to the Middle East peace process, the official Emirati news agency WAM said Saturday. AFP reports from Abu Dhabi. Clinton called Sheikh Zayed, who is recovering from surgery at the Mayo clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, to wish him well. WAM said they discussed "the obstacles to the Middle East peace process and the necessity of using every effort to bring about a just and complete peace in the region." Wam said.

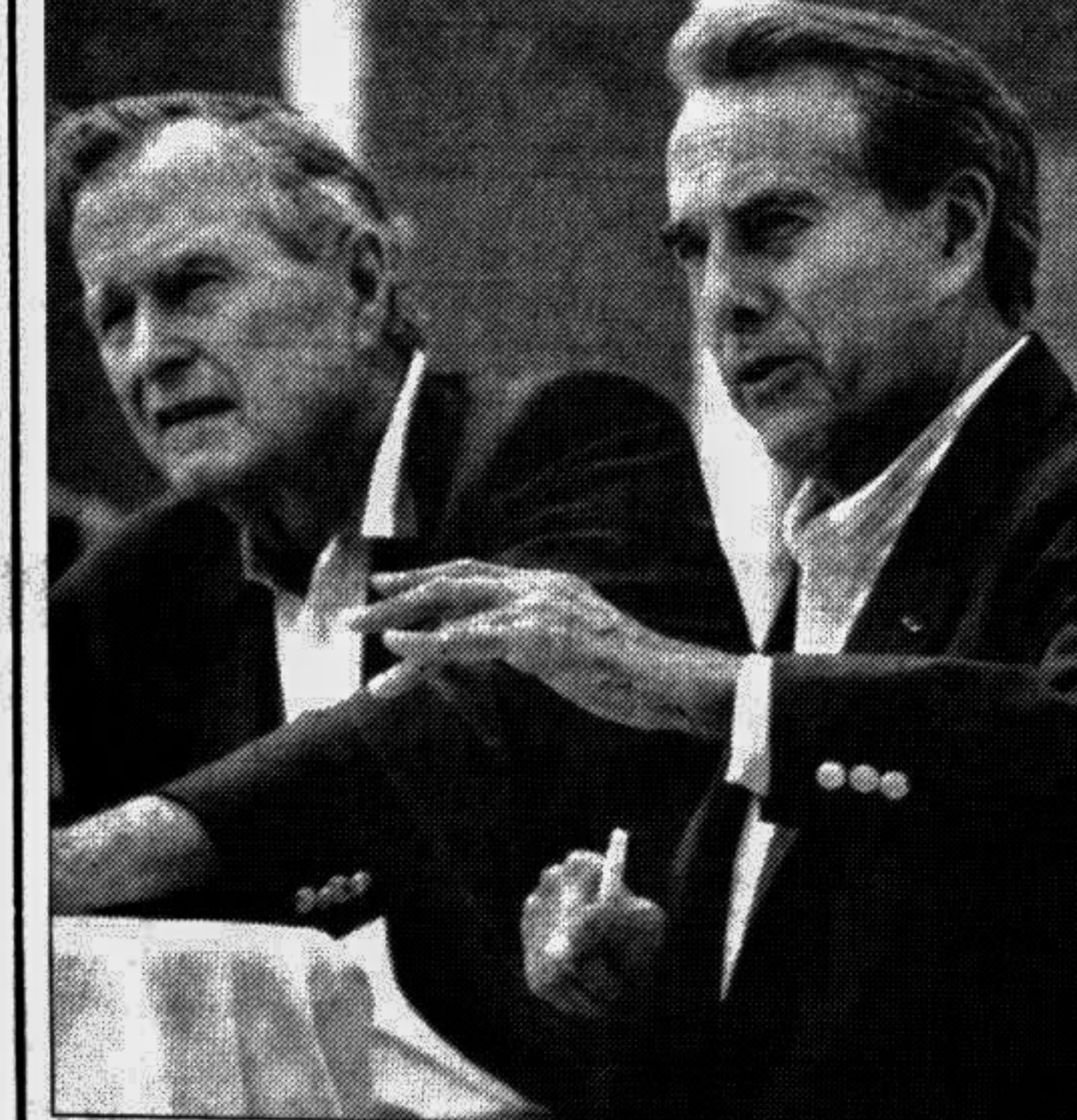
23 killed in SA road mishap: At least 23 people were killed and another 26 injured in a fiery road accident in South Africa on Saturday when a passenger bus collided with a petrol tanker, police said. Reuter reports from Johannesburg. The vehicles were totally burnt out and the bodies were badly charred. We are not sure yet but the death toll is now between 23 and 30 people," a police spokesman told Reuters. "There are 14 people critically injured and another 12 who are seriously hurt." The accident occurred near the town of Warmbaths north of Pretoria at about 1.30 pm (1130 GMT), a minibus taxi, and collided with a petrol tanker. Both vehicles burst into flames.

Pneumonia claims 11 in Spain: The death of a 94-year-old woman brought to 11 the number of people killed in a pneumonia outbreak whose origin has experts baffled. AP reports from Alcala de Henares, Spain. The latest victim, whose name was not released, died late Friday, according to the Prince of Asturias hospital, where 200 of the victims have been taken. Elderly people have mostly been the victims of the outbreak that began in late August in the town of Alcala de Henares, 15 miles (25 kilometres) northeast of Madrid. It was apparently spread through the water system. "Everybody around here is worried, especially us old people. There have been so many deaths, you just don't know who's next," said 72-year-old Jose Martin Lopez, who lives in a senior citizen's home.

Yemen's exiled Sultan returns: A former sultan of South Yemen, exiled in 1958 when his homeland was a British possession, made an emotional return Saturday to his native area of Lahej. AFP reports from Aden, Yemen. A Former Sultan Ali Abdallah Karim al-Fadl was welcomed to the town of Huthah, the chief town of Lahej province north of Aden by hundreds of residents chanting his name and throwing flowers, and the cries of women. The weeping Fadl gave a short speech in which he thanked president Ali Abdallah Saleh for allowing him to go home after 38 years in exile. Fadl arrived in Aden on Friday where he stayed at a hotel near his palace which had been commandeered by the former Marxist authorities of South Yemen, who turned it into a law school and museum.

US citizen held in DPRK: North Korea has arrested a US citizen who entered the country illegally through China and plans to punish him for spying, the north's official Korea Central News Agency (KCNA) said yesterday. AFP reports from Seoul. KCNA identified the arrested man as Evan Carl Hunziger, and said that after his arrest on August 24, "it has been proved by investigation that he was sent for espionage by South Korea's agency for national security planning. He will have to take an appropriate penal responsibility under the DPRK (North Korean) criminal law," KCNA said.

Quake hits NZ North Island: An earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.0 shook parts of New Zealand's lower North Island on Sunday morning but there were no reports of damage. AP reports from Wellington. Terry Weeb, a seismologist at the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences, said the earthquake was centred 40 kilometres (25 miles) south-east of the township of Dannevirke.



US Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole (R) answers when asked if he was nervous about the debates during a meeting with former US President George Bush (L) at the Dole's Bal Harbour, FL condominium Saturday. Dole met with Bush during a break in his preparations for the presidential debates. — AFP/UNB photo

CPI(M) threatens to quit if Cong (I) joins UF govt

NEW DELHI, Oct 6: India's largest communist party has threatened to quit the ruling coalition if the Congress (I) Party of former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao is allowed to join, newspapers said today, reports AFP.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) announced Saturday that it would walk out if Congress were allowed to become part of the United Front, the Indian Express and other dailies said.

CPI-M Politburo member Sitaramyechury, speaking in the northern hill town of Shimla, argued the Congress was only supporting the minority United Front government of Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda out of political compulsion.

He added: "We will walk out of the United Front if the

Congress joins it or is allowed to share power in the centre." The CPI-M has 32 members in the 545-seat parliament. It was the driving force behind the formation of the 13-party United Front, although it did not join the government, which comprises six parties.

The Communist Party of India (CPI), with 12 MPs, is the only leftist component of the government.

The CPI-M's threat follows growing speculation here that the Congress wanted to join the United Front following the resignation by former premier Rao as the party president last month.

Newspapers have said Deve Gowda also wanted the Congress in his government to give it a majority status.

CIS vows to defend areas if Afghan clash spills over

ALMATY, Oct 6: The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has vowed to defend areas bordering on Afghanistan if fighting there spills over. But leaders agreed at a summit meeting not to interfere in the conflict, reports Reuter.

Five leaders of former Soviet republics, alarmed by the rise to power in Kabul of a radical Islamic militia, ended their summit on Friday with an appeal to the rival groups to hold talks and for the United Nations to discuss the situation.

"We call upon all warring parties to stop hostilities and resume peace negotiations," Kazakhstan's President Nursulttan Nazarbayev said at a joint news conference.

He also accused the Taliban militia of human rights violations after the seizure of Kabul

last week, referring to the execution of some of the Taliban's political opponents. "We denounce the executions and violations of human rights committed in Afghanistan," Nazarbayev said.

Kabul's new Islamist rulers scoffed in response and recalled the Soviet Union's failed intervention in the 1980s.

"I am very happy that God has given this much pomp and credit to the Taliban that a big power is afraid of the Taliban," Acting Information Minister Amir Jan Mutaqi told a Kabul news conference.

"The Russian people have not forgotten their past experience in Afghanistan and I think they won't dare to repeat that." The Taliban's victims included former Moscow-backed Afghan

President Najibullah, a communist installed as Afghan leader in 1987 during the 10-year Soviet occupation of the country.

The presidents of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin were present at the summit.

Three Central Asian states — Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which was not present — border Afghanistan.

Russian and Tajikistan, following up the summit, agreed on Saturday to tighten security on the Tajik-Afghan border, where Russian frontier guards are helping the pro-Moscow government in Dushanbe resist Islamic Tajik rebels based in Afghanistan.

Parliamentary polls in Kuwait today

KUWAIT CITY, Oct 6: Kuwaitis going to the polls on Monday will be voting in the only elected assembly among Gulf Arab states and the only one with legislative powers, reports AFP.

"Kuwait is a democracy, in which sovereignty resides in the people, the source of all powers," the sixth article of the constitution states.

Elections are held every four years to the 50-seat national assembly, or parliament, which has the power to draw up and vote on new legislation.

Although bills must be approved by the Emir before becoming law.

The new parliament will be the eighth since the first elections in 1963, and the second since the seven-month Iraqi occupation between 1990 and 1991.

There are some 107,000 eligible voters from a population of some 700,000 Kuwaiti citizens, as women, members of the armed forces and naturalised Kuwaitis are excluded. In addition, only men are allowed to stand as candidates.

Executive powers are vested in the Emir and his ministers, who are directly appointed by the Emir. At least one of the ministers must come from the elected members of parliament, and the prime minister is traditionally the crown prince.

During the 1992 parliament, the cabinet was made up of between 15 and 16 ministers, of which up to six ministers were drawn from the 50 elected MPs at any one time.

All the ministers are members of parliament.



Soldiers belonging to religious Taliban militia fires with Russian made tank on the forces of former government defence minister Ahmad Shah Masood at the frontline of Panjsher Valley, north of Kabul, on Saturday. The fighting started Saturday night between Taliban militia and former government forces. Both the rival used heavy artillery during the fighting. — AFP/UNB photo

EU summit ends in Dublin Leaders pledge to change treaty to accommodate newcomers

DUBLIN, Ireland, Oct 6: European Union leaders have vowed to revamp their organisation within nine months, but disagreed on how much power it should have over member states and how fast to expand eastward, reports AP.

At a special one-day summit Saturday, the 15 heads of state pledged to change the European Union treaty to accommodate a dozen newcomers, most of them east European countries.

"Without any preconditions, we all agreed that the treaty should be finalised" as scheduled at the end of June, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl said.

The reform debate began in March and has made slow progress because the new treaty would give the EU powers now held by national governments.

This is a sticky issue, especially in Britain. Prime Minister John Major cautioned his partners not to get carried away with European integration.

"Look before you leap is a much better watchword for the European Union than leap before you look," he told reporters after the summit.

Major faces a vocal group of voters who are pressuring him not to compromise British sovereignty.

He must call elections within seven months, and his Conservative Party holds only a one-seat majority in Parliament. The party is split on how far Britain should integrate with the rest of Europe.

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Off the Record Suicide watch on Fergie

LONDON: A British newspaper reported on Sunday that Queen Elizabeth had ordered a round-the-clock suicide watch on the troubled Duchess of York, who was distraught over mounting personal problems, reports Reuter.

The people quoted unnamed friends as saying the former Sarah Ferguson, known widely as Fergie and divorced from the queen's second son Prince Andrew, had spent hours "weeping hysterically" behind her locked bedroom door.

Fergie has become a favourite target of the tabloid press, which is devoting large amounts of space to details about her financial problems and allegedly voracious sexual appetite.



"It doesn't seem possible that one person could survive so much humiliation," a royal source told the people.

Revelations by a former spiritual adviser that the duchess had at least two affairs while married to Andrew have been serialised in several tabloid newspapers.

The Sunday Times said the queen had summoned a crisis meeting this month to discuss what could be done to prevent the duchess from further damaging the image of the royal family.

The newspaper said the queen was "deeply concerned" and had taken legal advice on how Andrew could restrain his wife, including whether he could gain custody of the couple's young daughters, Beatrice and Eugenie.

It said the queen, husband Prince Philip and other royals would discuss limiting Fergie's access to staff at Buckingham Palace and whether she should retain her title of duchess. She lost the prefix her royal highness when she divorced.

It was just Kenny G's old house

HUNT'S POINT, Washington: That wasn't saxophone music floating out across Lake Washington. It was just Kenny G's old house, reports AP.

The imposing 1930s brick mansion, framed with old-growth timber, was loaded onto a barge Friday for transport through the Ballard Locks and across Puget Sound.

The pop saxophonist has moved into part of a bigger house he is building on the same property in this suburb east of Seattle. He plans a swimming pool on the site of the old house.

The old house is headed to a new owner and will sit on South Beach, west of Seattle. The move comes in the same week as the release of Kenny G's latest CD, The Moment.

Kenny G said it would have been cheaper to tear down the old house, but wanted to avoid losing any adjacent trees during demolition, so he had it moved instead.

Ali's latest fight is in court

LOS ANGELES: Muhammad Ali's latest fight is in court, reports AP.

All claims his picture was put on a telephone credit card without permission. He's suing Forever Films and Nevada-based telephone company America for \$500,000.

A Superior Court judge on Friday scheduled trial for February 4.

The breach of contract suit claims All granted the Los Angeles-based film company non-exclusive rights to use his name and likeness in the promotion of the 1989 film "Champions Forever."

But in 1994, the suit claims, Forever Films illegally allowed America to use the boxer's photograph on a calling card.

Fear of Taliban edicts replaces old fears of rockets in Kabul

KABUL, Oct 6: At the military hospital in the heart of the capital, Afghanistan's top surgeon wrapped herself in a large shawl and hid in a back room to have a cigarette with four colleagues, reports AP.

When the door opened, she jumped, quickly put out the cigarette and buried herself further inside the shawl, afraid the intruder was one of the Islamic Taliban soldiers who overran the capital only days earlier.

But the next day, seven smiling Taliban fighters, rifles slung over their shoulders, blocked the door to her office.

"She's gone," said one. They did know where, but they knew

she had been replaced — by a man.

Dr Sohalla had been a general in the Afghan army. She had survived the communist government of Najibullah, the invasion of the Soviet army and the four-year war between Islamic factions.

But she vanished under the cloak covering Kabul as the Taliban asserts its hard-line interpretation of Islam.

An unsettling quiet descended over the city on September 27, the night the Taliban overran Kabul. At 9:30 pm, the streets were empty. Check posts had been abandoned, key government installations deserted.

Afghanistan's ethnic minorities worried that the Taliban, who mostly are members of the majority Pashtun ethnic group, would see them as loyal to the fleeing government. Earlier in the day, an inter-

national aid worker said Taliban fighters had infiltrated an eastern suburb of the city and reassured everyone they wouldn't be hurt — unless they were Tajiks or from the Panjshir Valley. In that case, they would be killed.

That night, Mohammed Gul, an ethnic Tajik, paced the floor, wondering aloud if he should flee or just hide. Two friends on their way out of Kabul banged at his 10-foot (3-metre) wooden gate to ask Gul to join them, or at least to accept two Kalashnikov rifles for protection.

He refused both offers. But that night in the darkness of the basement, he listened and waited. There was the occasional thud of tank fire, followed by seemingly endless heavy machine gunfire.

With the first light of dawn came the sound of chanting just one block away.

The Taliban had arrived. On

a tank they stood with a loud-speaker and recited verses of the Koran in Arabic.

They had managed to enter Kabul with little resistance since the former government ordered its troops to pull back to the Panjshir valley, some 90 miles (145 kilometres) away.

Slowly, the war-weary residents stepped outside, thankful they had been saved further bloodshed. But the sense of relief didn't last.

The Taliban moved quickly to establish their brand of Islamic rule.

Former communist President Najibullah was dragged from the United Nations compound where he had spent the last four years. Fighters tortured him and hung his bloated corpse from a traffic post outside the presidential palace — a warning to the enemies of Islam, the Taliban said.

Soon after, Kabul's 750,000

residents were ordered to begin listening to Radio Kabul to hear the latest pronouncements.

Men were told to grow beards, go to the mosque for prayers, and wear skull caps or turbans. Photography was prohibited. Women were banned from working and required to wear burkas, a large piece of fabric that fits over the head with only a mesh opening for the eyes.

Schools for girls were closed. Today, women have virtually disappeared from the streets of Kabul. The few still on the streets move quickly, seldom looking directly at anyone.

Before the Taliban's arrival, Kabul's women had cared about their appearance. Through years without without electricity or running water, they still managed to look beautifully groomed and perfectly coiffed.

While Kabul's previous government had followed the Islamic tradition of requiring women to cover their heads and wear loose-fitting shirts and pants, some women had still managed to look fashionable: Black mesh stockings, spiked heeled shoes, sequined scarves and — voila — their Islamic modesty had a glamorous touch.

But no more. Even two women who were totally concealed under traditional robes were targeted by Taliban fighters, who broke a steel radio antenna off a car and beat them on the street. Witnesses said no one interfered.

Tension in the city is palpable.

Heavily armed Taliban fighters roar through the streets in pickup trucks. Tanks rumble down the main avenues and on residential streets.

Men are herded into mosques to worship.