

# Jordan urges Israel, PA not to break peace talks

AMMAN, Aug 3: Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan urged Israel and the Palestinians on Saturday not to break peace talks after a deadly dual suicide attack in Jerusalem, saying they must make tangible progress to avoid further violence, reports Reuters.

Describing the explosions that tore through a Jewish market killing 13 people and the two bombers as the latest round in a "bad nightmare" of bloodshed, the Crown Prince said the two sides must tackle "day-to-day life giving issues" to improve the status of ordinary Palestinians.

"Engagement between the core countries to the peace making exercise is the only option," the Crown Prince said in an interview with Reuters.

"No progress effectively means hurting people's basic

interests and investing in new generations of suicide bombers and a new wave of fanaticism."

Israel suspended talks with the Palestinian Authority after the bombing and closed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Acting Minister of Information Nasser al-Lawzi told reporters after a Cabinet meeting on Saturday which mainly focused on the crisis in peace talks that the closure could only result in more violence.

Foreign Minister Fayed al-Tarawanah also criticised Israel for its reaction to the bombing, saying it was critical that it perceived the Palestinian Authority as a partner and not an enemy.

Jordan, with a large Palestinian population and long borders with both Israel and the West Bank, is particularly sensitive to the potential for Palesti-

nian unrest. It signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 but despite continued close cooperation it has grown increasingly critical of the Jewish state.

Prince Hassan said he felt deep frustration after today's bombing in Jerusalem.

"You have warned against the possibility of acts of violence and loss of life. And yet somehow, like a bad nightmare, you have to live through them," he said.

Four months ago the Crown Prince visited the north Jordanian border territory of Baqura after a Jordanian soldier shot dead seven Israeli girls on a school trip to the area.

"When I went to that site I made it clear that if you accept that violence is the norm that escalation would include Israeli violence on the one side and

Arab violence on the other," he said. "It is our responsibility, committed to the peace process. To maintain the moderate middle ground."

The initial glow of Jordan's peace with Israel has waned since Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took office last year, opposed to trading captured Arab land for peace. Popular resentment at the peace treaty is growing and King Hussein has openly doubted Netanyahu's commitment to peace.

Prince Hassan said Israel's programme of building Jewish settlements on Arab land was "diminishing the chances of any form of political breakthrough" in talks with Palestinians.

"We have made our position very clear, that settlements are null and void in legal terms," he said.

# Lankan battle death toll rises to 243 so far

COLOMBO, Aug 3: The death toll in a major battle between Tamil Tiger separatists and government forces in northern Sri Lanka has risen to 243, most of them guerrillas, defence officials said today, reports AFP.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who initiated the assault against military forces in the northern town of Ommathai lost at least 193 cadres, officials said.

The said the military had recovered the bodies of 107 Tiger guerrillas by Saturday afternoon and intercepts of guerrillas communications showed they had taken another 86 bodies.

At least 50 security personnel, including 19 policemen were killed in the battle which started just before midnight Friday and went on until Saturday morning, officials said.

The clandestine Voice of Tigers monitored in the northern town of Vavuniya, 260 kilometres (160 miles) north of here, said the guerrillas inflicted heavy losses on the military.

The Voice of Tigers said today that they lost only 82 of their cadres and claimed killing 79 government troops, and wounding more than 250.

The rebel radio said they used a heavy concentration of women cadres and most of the guerrillas who died were women fighters known as "freedom birds."



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (L) receives Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat (C) and the number two Palestinian official, Mahmoud Abbas (Abou Mazen) (R) in Alexandria, Saturday. Arafat urged the United States and Egypt to take action to salvage the Middle East peace process, which had already been deadlocked for four months before this week's suicide-bombing in a crowded Jerusalem market. — AFP/UNB photo

# Moderate intellectual Khatami takes office today in Iran

TEHRAN, Aug 3: Iran's new President Mohammad Khatami, who takes office on Monday, is a moderate intellectual who speaks four languages and is credited with promoting cultural and artistic freedom in the Islamic republic, reports AFP.

The former culture minister, who was forced out of government in 1992 under pressure from hardline conservatives, has been nicknamed "the 20-million-vote" president because of his stunning landslide election victory on May 23.

Khatami, 54, was backed by a coalition of moderates, made up largely of modernising technocrats close to outgoing President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and radical left-wingers.

But it was his mass appeal to young people, women and academics which ensured his upset victory after starting the race as a relative unknown with little chance of beating the establishment candidate.

Young people make up more than half of the country's 64 million population, and had complained of feeling left out of the conservative Iranian society. Khatami's message of respect for human rights and greater personal freedom to them.

The westernised city population, at cultural odds with the conservative clergy and generally too cynical about the Islamic regime to vote, were also won over by the highly-edu-

cated Khatami who speaks fluent English, German and Arabic.

Middle-class voters remembered his tolerant attitude during his tenure as culture minister in the 1980s, a time of unprecedented cultural and artistic freedom.

Women, too, are enthusiastic about the mild-mannered, impeccably-dressed and bearded cleric whom observers say may break with tradition and bring the first women into his cabinet.

The father of a son and two daughters, Khatami is a Hujatoleslam, a religious cleric ranking one below the title of Ayatollah.

He also bears the title of Syed, a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (SM), an attribute which earned him respect from deeply religious Iranians.

Khatami briefly headed the Islamic culture centre in Hamburg, Germany, before the 1979 Islamic Revolution toppled the US-backed Shah and brought the Shi'ite Muslim clergy to power.

In 1982 he was appointed a minister of culture, a post he occupied for 10 years before the increasingly powerful conservative faction, keen to reimpose strict Islamic values and ideology, forced him out.

He worked in the obscure post of director of the national library for five years before coming in from the cold by standing for president.

# UN mediator says Peace efforts in Congo Republic faltering

BRAZZAVILLE, Aug 3: A UN mediator acknowledged Saturday that efforts to negotiate a settlement between the Republic of Congo's warring factions were faltering, reports AP.

The special envoy, Mohamed Sahnoun of Algeria, said a two-week peace initiative was "in difficulty" and urged the two sides to display more interest in achieving peace.

But in an indication of hardening attitudes, state radio reported that backers of former dictator Denis Sassou-Nguesso were demanding the resignation of his rival, President Pascal Lissouba.

Lissouba's army and Sassou-Nguesso's militia began fighting each other June 5, causing a mass exodus of civilians from Brazzaville and extensive damage to the city centre.

Though fighting has subsided for the past two weeks, Sassou-Nguesso has denounced Lissouba's moves to extend his term in office indefinitely because of the postponement of scheduled July 27 elections. His term was to end this month.

# Naga leaders closer to unity

ATLANTA, Aug 3: Leaders from the east Indian state of Nagaland drew closer to unity Saturday but stopped short of sealing a peace accord among Naga factions involved in negotiations here, reports AP.

Details of a "national appeal" would be outlined Sunday at a news conference, said Dan Buttry of the Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America, which has been assisting the weeklong talks at Emory University.

"From all walks of Naga society, we commit ourselves to the pursuit of peace even though the way is not clear," said a statement to be signed by various factional leaders. "We have taken a step on this journey through our deliberations in Atlanta. We intend to press on and not go back to the evils of destroying our people."

"As Naga political and social groups, we pledge ourselves to maintain and strengthen the unity we have formed," the statement said.

There has been fighting since 1950 to carve a homeland for the Naga tribespeople, the biggest community in the remote mountainous area that is joined to mainland India by a narrow strip of land north of Bangladesh.

The rebels claim that the Naga chieftains, who ruled the region, were forced to join India when British colonialism ended in 1947.

The government of the largely Christian state, whose people largely want independence from predominantly Hindu India, has been involved in discussions including three of four major factions and some social organisations, working on the creation of Naga unity, Buttry said.

# Series of crises grip Janata Dal

NEW DELHI, Aug 3: A series of crises shadowing Indian Premier Inder Kumar Gujral's party deepened today with leaders and the media slamming his sacking of the Bihar government, now headed by the wife of arrested leader Laloo Prasad Yadav, an arch-foe of Janata Dal chief Sharad Yadav.

Sharad Yadav has refused to resign after a New Delhi court said it felt there was sufficient evidence to implicate him in

the bribery scandal.

The Asian Age daily said in an editorial on Sunday that the Dal, the main component in India's multi-party ruling coalition, had to get its house in order.

The court strictures against Janata Dal president Sharad Yadav should now make the individual and the party sit up and take fresh stock of the situation.

# Singapore govt warns citizens to shun ecstasy

SINGAPORE, Aug 3: Singapore's government has warned citizens to shun ecstasy as the number of people arrested for taking the "disco drug" in the island crossed 1,000, reports AFP.

"Youths have been drawn to ecstasy by its 'designer drug' label and the misconception that it is less harmful than hard drugs like heroin," Minister of State for Home Affairs Law Ho Peng Kee said Saturday.

"However, research and experience have shown that ecstasy is dangerous — it can permanently damage the brain, liver, heart and kidneys and even kill," he said at a seminar on the abuse of ecstasy, which first emerged here in 1995.

He said the city-state's narcotics police would keep up enforcement efforts against abuse of ecstasy, including action against suppliers and abusers, and surprise raids on night spots and entertainment outlets.

Ecstasy acts as a stimulant, inducing a rush of euphoria into users. It is becoming increasingly popular among affluent young Asians as a recreational drug, and is said to be favoured by disco-goers to keep dancing the night away.

The police said they had mounted 500 raids in the past 16 months and caught more than 1,000 people using the pill. Last year, 534 people were arrested.

He said the majority of ecstasy abusers here were men, aged between 20 and 29 and nearly all were ethnic Chinese.

Singapore has some of the world's toughest drug penalties, including a mandatory death sentence for anyone convicted of trafficking 15 grams (half an ounce) of heroin, 30 grams (one ounce) of morphine and 500 grams (30 ounces) of cannabis.

# Over 1,000 stage peace rally in Phnom Penh

PHNOM PENH, Aug 3: Over 1,000 monks, nuns and laymen marched through the streets of Phnom Penh early Sunday to pray for peace in the wake of a bloody coup which has sparked fears of renewed civil war in Cambodia, reports AP.

The marchers — led by the country's supreme monk Maha Ghosananda who asked in his prayers that "peace prevail in Cambodia" — began their walk at Sampaue Meas pagoda and completed it at the Independence Monument in the centre of the city.

Dressed in saffron and white robes, the monks and nuns clasped their hands in prayer as they wound through the quiet streets which had been closed off to traffic. Many carried

banners, lotus flowers or light blue flags.

The march comes on the heels of last month's coup led by Second Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Cambodian People's Party (CPP) which ousted the country's first premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

Two days of heavy fighting in the capital left many Cambodians angry that the country's fragile peace — born after UN-brokered elections in 1993 — had been shattered. The gun-battle raised concerns of more bloodshed in the run up to next year's polls.

"We will have peace when the leaders decide to solve their problems through negotiations and peaceful means," one of the monks, Kim Teng, said.

# 2 Russian cosmonauts will blast off to repair Mir

BAIKONUR, Kazakhstan, Aug 3: Two Russian cosmonauts will blast off from the Baikonur Cosmodrome on Tuesday on a vital mission to repair the troubled Mir Space Station whose module was damaged in a collision on June 25, reports AFP.

Flight Engineer Pavel Vinogradov and Commander Anatoly Solovoyv — one of Russia's most decorated cosmonauts — will head for Mir on board a Soyuz-U rocket, due to blast off at 9:35 pm (1535 GMT) from the launchpad in Kazakhstan.

The Soyuz TM-26 capsule is scheduled to dock at 1723 GMT on Thursday with the ageing orbital station, where the cos-

monauts will meet up with their weary colleagues — Vasily Tsiibliyev, Alexander Lazutkin and NASA astronaut Michael Foale — who have had to tackle a spate of problems since arriving on Mir in February.

Unlike most of the previous missions to Mir, which has been orbiting Earth for 11 years, this time the cosmonauts have virtually no scientific programme.

Vinogradov and Solovoyv will concentrate on repairing the craft so that it can remain in service at least until 1999, when the first flights on board a new international space station, Alpha, are due to begin.

# Market blast 35 Palestinians held in Israel

JERUSALEM, Aug 3: Bracing for the possibility of more suicide bombings, Israel arrested more than 35 Palestinians early Sunday in the West Bank and reinforced security in major cities and crowded recreational spots, reports AP.

The measures came four days after a twin bombing attack took 15 lives in Jerusalem's main fruit-and-vegetable market. Islamic militants have threatened to carry out more bombings unless Israel released activists from prison.

Police chief Asaf Hefetz said that although he had received no specific intelligence reports about a bombing attack, enough warning signs existed to warrant bolstered security throughout the country.

# Mandela's letter to Suharto seeking release of E-Timorese leader

JAKARTA, Aug 3: A letter from South African President Nelson Mandela calling for Indonesia to release jailed East Timorese rebel leader Xanana Gusmao was delivered to the country, reports said today, reports AFP.

Indonesian President Suharto did not receive the letter until Friday because it was delivered to the wrong embassy in South Africa, the Kompas daily said, quoting Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas.

"The letter was supposed to be delivered to the Indonesian embassy in Pretoria."

# BRIEFLY

**Road mishap kills 9 in India:** At least nine passengers were killed on the spot and 18 others injured, 12 of them seriously, when a minibus met with an accident near Butta Chowk under Kalyanpur police station late Saturday night, police said, PTI reports from Samastipur.

The Deputy Police Superintendent, Samastipur, Kunwar Singh told PTI that the injured passengers were sent to Patna Medical College Hospital (PMCH) for treatment. The ill-fated bus was on its way to Samastipur from Darbhanga.

**Gunmen kill 5 in Colombia:** Five people were killed and another three were missing Saturday when a heavily armed group attacked a poor neighbourhood in northeastern Colombia, police said, AFP reports from Bogota.

The victims bodies were riddled with bullets and found sprawled on a football field, officials said. Witnesses said a total of eight people were dragged out of their homes before dawn by an unspecified number of armed men. Officials said they had done it, but acknowledged it could be the work of Colombia's bloody rightwing paramilitary groups.

**Mine blast claims 15 in China:** An explosion in a private coal mine in southwestern China's Guizhou province killed 15 people and left another five injured, it was reported today, AFP says from Hong Kong.

The deaths in last month's accident could have been avoided if the operators of the mine in Huaxi had heeded earlier orders from authorities to shut down the mine shaft because of inadequate measure to expel air, the Chinese-language Sing Tao daily said in the report. The report did not say whether the owners of the mine were arrested after last month's explosion.

**2 Palestinian newsmen held:** Two Palestinian journalists were arrested on Saturday by Israeli police at an army roadblock near their southern West Bank town, officials said, AFP reports from Halhoul.

The two journalists, Kwattir Salam, of the Palestinian newspaper Al Hayat al-Jadida, and Mazen Dana, a Palestinian cameraman employed by Britain's Reuters news agency, were arrested after failing to obey army orders to leave the area, an Israeli military official said. "The soldiers called the police after arguing with the journalists, who came too close to their roadblock where they were posted," the official said.



Newly-crowned Miss South Africa 1997, Kerishnie Naiker, from KwaZulu-Natal balances her crown at the finals at Sun City a gambling and entertainment resort northwest of Johannesburg Saturday. Naiker a pharmacist studying for her masters degree has deep interest in Indian classical and South Indian village dancing. — AFP/UNB photo

# Torrential rains claim 28 lives in India

NEW DELHI, Aug 3: At least 28 people were killed in torrential rains in several parts of the country on Saturday as normal life came to a standstill in the northern region due to heavy downpour for the second day today, reports PTI.

While landslides in Kotdwar in Uttar Pradesh claimed 11

# Yeltsin leaves Irish PM stranded on airport tarmac

LONDON, Aug 3: Russian President Boris Yeltsin left Irish Prime Minister Albert Reynolds stranded on an airport tarmac in a 1994 diplomatic incident because he was too ill to get off his plane, Yeltsin's former top bodyguard says in his memoirs, reports Reuters.

The fiasco happened at Ireland's Shannon Airport when Yeltsin failed to appear during a stopover and a deputy was sent instead.

Yeltsin was accused by critics at the time of being drunk but Alexander Korzhakov, his friend, bodyguard and adviser for 11 years, said the Russian leader had suffered a heart attack or mild stroke.

Excerpts from Korzhakov's memoirs were published in the London Sunday Times under the headline: "Revealed: Yeltsin's sober excuse for Irish fiasco."

Korzhakov said he was woken by Yeltsin's wife Naina and told that he had got up in the night while flying over the Atlantic to go to the Lavotvry. But he then collapsed.

lives eight people died in Himachal Pradesh, seven in Gujarat and two in Kolhapur (Maharashtra) taking the toll in the current monsoon season across the country to 350.

Gujarat bore the brunt of the monsoon fury with 230 deaths followed by Kerala 64, Uttar Pradesh 30, Karnataka 14, Himachal Pradesh eight, Assam, Meghalaya and Kolhapur (Maharashtra) two each.

Reports said 11 people were killed and three injured when jeep carrying them was buried under debris following a landslide near Khairkhalon Rishikesh Kotdwar road in the Garhwal hills this evening. The tragedy occurred when an overloaded jeep returning from Shiv Mela at the famous Neelkanth Temple.

Eight people died in landslides as increasing rains lashed Himachal Pradesh submerging vast tracts of land in Killu.

Four people died in a landslide triggered by rains in tribal Bhamaur area of Chamba district while in another incident four people drowned when their truck fell into a river in Kullu district, a Shimla report said.

In Gujarat, torrential rains claimed seven lives and about 10,000 people were evacuated following floods.

Helicopters and army personnel were pressed into service for rescue operations in the worst-affected Sabarkantha district.

In Kolhapur in Maharashtra two persons were washed away by swirling waters in Bhudgarh and Shahuwandi Talukas.

Life came to a standstill in the northern region as heavy rains lashed several parts for the second day today.

# US investigators seek motive of bomb plot in NY subway

NEW YORK, Aug 3: Investigators worked to piece together evidence of a subway bomb plot that included a possible suicide note that ranted against Americans and Jews, reports AP.

Also Saturday, federal officials released immigration information about suspect Gazi Ibrahim Abu Mezer to try to rebut charges the man had been allowed to stay in the country even after officials knew he was a suspected terrorist.

The Immigration and Naturalisation Service said Abu Mezer was released from US detention in February, two months before he filed an asylum claim acknowledging Israel alleged he was a terrorist.

Abu Mezer had doggedly tried to sneak into the United States in which his Palestinian family says was an innocent pursuit of the American dream. But authorities say Abu Mezer

and another Palestinian man were actually plotting to carry out a suicide bombing on a crowded New York City subway.

A suicide note, written by Abu Mezer in Arabic, spouted hatred for Jews and Americans, denounced persecution of Arabs and said goodbye to his family, according to media reports. Also found were anti-Israel literature and a portrait of Sheikh Omar Abdul Rahman, a cleric serving a life sentence for conspiring to wage a holy war, the reports said.

An investigator in New York, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said authorities were translating piles of Arabic material pulled from the apartment and reviewing records from nearby pay phones to determine a motive.

"We don't know if these guys were lone wolves or were connected and supported by a terrorist organisation," the source said.

The Mideast terror group Hamas denied any involvement Saturday in the plan with Abu Mezer, 23, and Laif Khalil, 22, both arrested Thursday on charges they were hours away from detonating nail-studded pipe bombs in a Brooklyn subway station.

A statement sent to the AP's Amman, Jordan, bureau Saturday and signed by the terrorist group Hamas denied "any relationship between us and those who were detained" in the Brooklyn incident.

And Abu Mezer's family said in Hebron that in phone calls home he had spoken of the United States and its people in glowing terms.

"It's impossible my brother would do something like that," Noor Abu Mezer said. "He's a

nonviolent person."

A federal law enforcement source in Washington told the AP that both suspects have been linked to Hamas — Khalil by intelligence sources and Abu Mezer by his own application for asylum in the United States.

But James Kallstrom, head of the New York FBI office, said it "is totally wrong to say that these individuals are connected to and directed by Hamas."

CBS News reported from Israel that unidentified Palestinian sources said the suspects worked for Mousa Abu Marzook, political leader of the Hamas terrorist group, who was deported from the United States in May.

Abu Mezer, who has a Jordanian passport, sought asylum after federal agents arrested him in January trying to enter the United States in Bellingham, Washington. Twice before he had been caught trying to cross the Canadian border and was sent back, but Canada refused to accept him a third time.

Under threat of deportation, Abu Mezer claimed in an immigration document that he feared persecution in Israel because he had been falsely accused of being part of a terrorist organisation. His family said his only arrest was in 1990 for throwing rocks at Israeli troops.

Khalil was in the US on a tourist visa that expired in December.

During a June 23 hearing, Abu Mezer withdrew his application and agreed to leave the country within 60 days.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair (2nd R) and his wife, Cherie (2nd L), stroll with their children, Nicholas, Katherine and Ewan (L-R) in San Gimignano, a celebrated town in the Tuscan Chianti region Saturday at the start of their summer holiday in Italy. — AFP/UNB photo