

King Hussein issues fresh appeal to Israel

Arafat asks Palestinians to 'prepare for battle'

JERUSALEM, Aug 7: Yasser Arafat is telling his people to "prepare for battle," saying the worst is yet to come in crippling Israeli sanctions. Newly trained Palestinian fighters have declared themselves ready to meet a feared Israeli invasion, reports AP.

Armed Jordanian leaders urged both sides Wednesday to tone down the tough talk in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has suspended peace talks, ordered mass arrests, clamped a travel ban on the West Bank and Gaza and halted the transfer of vital tax revenues to Arafat's self-rule government in the week since suicide bombers killed themselves and 13 others in a crowded Jerusalem market.

"Prepare for battle that Netanyahu is forcing on us, because what is coming is worse than what has already been," Arafat said in Gaza, at a meeting with leaders of his Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

In the West Bank city of Ramallah, members of Fatah burned Israeli and US flags during a graduation ceremony for a course in weapons-handling and street combat.

The 50 graduates were trained to confront Israeli forces if they try to enter the Palestinian-controlled cities, Palestinian officials said. Hardliners within Netanyahu's government reportedly have urged him to take that step.

Netanyahu said that he was ready to ease up if Arafat clamps down on terror.

"If I had to say what is the indispensable step to saving peace, it is for the Palestinian Authority to take firm and decisive and immediate steps against the infrastructure of terrorism," Netanyahu said after meeting with Jordan's Crown Prince Hassan and Prime Minister Abdel-Salam Majali in Jerusalem.

Hassan countered that militants should not be allowed to sabotage the peace process.

AFP said, King Hussein of Jordan issued a fresh appeal Wednesday on behalf of the collapsing Middle East peace process after his brother the Crown Prince failed to persuade Israel to lift tough sanctions on the Palestinians.

The king quoted by the official news agency Petra, told a visiting delegation of Israeli trade unionists in Amman that "the supporters of peace must revive and push forward the peace process."

Sectarian violence death toll rises to 12 in Pakistan

LAHORE, Pakistan, Aug 7: At least 12 people were killed as two terrorist strikes targeted Sunni Muslims' mosques Wednesday in a sudden surge in sectarian violence in central Pakistan's Punjab province, police and hospital sources said, reports AFP.

The killings triggered a wave of anger in Lahore where a rampaging crowd pelted police with stones and damaged public and private property, witnesses reported.

Eight people died when unidentified gunmen opened fire on worshippers saying evening prayers, Latifur Rehman Imam (prayer leader) of the Ziaul Uloom Mosque in the provincial capital Lahore said.

Police earlier said two people died instantly while five others succumbed to their injuries in hospital, Rehman added another body was found later in the mosque compound.

Hours after the shooting in Lahore, a bomb exploded in another Sunni mosque in Multan city killing three people and injuring 15 others, five of them seriously, the sources said.

Residents in Multan said unidentified terrorists hurled the bomb when the collective prayers had just started while a police official suspected the explosive device, fitted with a timer, was planted under a bunch of prayer mats lying in the courtyard.

Indian women demand 33pc reservation for seats in parliament

NEW DELHI, Aug 7: Thousands of women from across the country today sent postcards to Prime Minister I.K. Gujral demanding immediate passage of a constitutional amendment-bill to provide 33 per cent reservation for them in parliament and assemblies, reports PTI.

The country-wide postcard campaign was launched by the National Alliance of Women to press the government to pass the bill pending before parliament without any further delay and reduction in percentage, Rute Manorama, president of the alliance said here.



Professor Muhammad Yunus has been honoured recently in Germany as a great social reformer of the current century. Picture shows (from left) Professor Muhammad Yunus, Husmand Saded, Mikhail Gorbachev and Professor Erwin Laszlo.

BRIEFLY

Israel reopens border with Egypt: Israel on Wednesday reopened the border with Egypt to allow stranded Palestinians into the Gaza Strip but it continued to turn away trucks carrying food and other imports Egyptian officials said, AFP reports from Rafah.

Israel is still maintaining its closure since last Wednesday of the Rafah post of vehicles transporting Egyptian products to the Palestinian autonomous territories, said border official Mosaad Badawi. It has turned out that the reopening Wednesday morning by the Israeli authorities of the border post applies only to Palestinians and not to goods, he said.

Albanian shot dead in Italy: An Albanian man recovering from a shooting last month was shot to death in his hospital bed Wednesday in violence police linked to drug dealing in Milan, AP says from Milan.

Three Albanians walked up to hospital employees to find out the room number of the orthopedic ward where Jeamal Kumburo, 28, was recovering from a leg wound, the Italian news agency ANSA reported. Then one of the trio walked into the room and opened fire, the report said. Two visitors in the room dove under the bed for cover and escaped injury, ANSA said.

NZ health minister sacked: New Zealand's one seat majority coalition government was yesterday thrown into a crisis when associate health minister Neil Kirton was sacked from his post in a row over the hiring of his brother-in-law for an advertising campaign, AFP reports from Wellington.

Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, who heads the junior New Zealand first coalition partner, said he sacked Kirton for breaching an agreement not to speak to media. "This morning Kirton went on radio in disregard to that instruction and accordingly I have dismissed him," Peters said. Kirton had no immediate comment.

Typhoon 'Victor' claims 65 so far: Sixty-five people died and more than 300 were injured when Typhoon Victor scoured China's south coast last weekend with deadly winds and rains that triggered floods and landslides, an official report said Thursday, AP reports from Beijing.

Estimates of damage and casualties have continued to rise as officials tally losses from remote parts of southern Guangdong province. Earlier reports had put the number killed at 49. Total economic losses from the typhoon, which destroyed or damaged more than 85,000 homes and inundated more than 850,000 hectares (2 million acres) of farmland, have risen to more than 2 billion yuan (dhs 241 million), the newspaper China Daily reported.



Taliban prisoners at the hand of Afghan Commander Ahmed Shah Masood sit on the ground of a jail Wednesday in this village near Masood's house in the Panshir Valley some 100 kilometres North of Kabul. Some 800 Taliban soldiers were captured in recent fighting by anti-Taliban alliance troops. — AFP/UNB photo

US official to meet Jiang Zemin: US National Security adviser Sandy Berger will meet Chinese President Jiang Zemin in China next week to discuss preparations for an October summit, the White House said on Wednesday. Reuter reports from Washington.

Spokeswoman Anne Luzzatto said Berger would depart on Saturday for Beijing and would have talks with Jiang and other Chinese leaders before returning to Washington next Wednesday.

ADB to set up mission in Lanka: The Manila-based Asian Development Bank has decided to set up a resident mission in Sri Lanka, to facilitate loan transactions, a government official said Thursday, AP reports from Colombo.

The planned mission follows a request by President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the official said.

Jakarta urged not to build N-plant: An environmental group called on the government Thursday to abandon all plans to build nuclear power plants and not just postpone construction, AP reports from Jakarta.

Last week the government announced it had shelved plans to build the first of several nuclear power plants by early next century.

US looking for positive actions from Khatami

WASHINGTON, Aug 7: The United States is looking for positive actions from Iran's new president before deciding whether to soften its stance, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"We have very serious problems with Iran," Albright said in response to questions following a major address on the Middle East. Iran sponsors international terrorism is undercutting the Middle East peace process and is purchasing dangerous chemical, nuclear and biological weapons she said.

"We are looking for actions, and that is what we're going to base our judgment on," she said.

Iran's new President Mohammad Khatami began his first day of work Wednesday after being officially installed in the presidential compound in Tehran.

Banzer sworn in as Bolivian president

LA PAZ, Bolivia, Aug 7: Former dictator Gen Hugo Banzer was sworn in as president of Bolivia Wednesday, promising to combat poverty, inequality, corruption and cocaine trafficking, reports AP.

"I promise that my administration will work toward creating a society with greater social justice and combat, the serious poverty that continues to afflict many of our people," he said.

Banzer, 71, took the oath in the National Congress building before the presidents of Ecuador, Peru, Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay and Paraguay, along with Spanish Prince Felipe, heir to the Spanish throne.

After being sworn-in for the five-year term, Banzer crossed the city's main square to the presidential palace, where he reviewed the troops while thousands cheered.

Hun Sen urges new co-premier for cooperation

PHNOM PENH, Aug 7: Cambodia strongman Hun Sen today called on his newly approved co-premier to "cooperate" with efforts to restore peace and stability in the strife-torn country and to protect human rights, reports AFP.

The call came in a letter of congratulations from powerful Second Premier Hun Sen to Foreign Minister Ung Hout, who was Wednesday voted into power by Parliament to replace ousted Prince Norodom Ranariddh.

"I strongly hope that your excellency, in the position of first prime minister, will cooperate very well with me in leading the future of our country towards national reconciliation, peace, stability," the letter said.

The missive, read on national radio today, also called for Ung Hout's "cooperation" is the "Continued implementation of democratic pluralism, the multi-party system and the respect of human rights."

E Timorese leader terms his release unimportant

JAKARTA, Aug 7: Jailed East Timorese rebel leader Xanana Gusmao said his release, as called for by South African President Nelson Mandela, was unimportant compared to the urgency for a settlement in East Timor, it was reported today, says AFP.

"My release is actually an unimportant matter. More important is how efforts to settle the East Timor problem in a just, peaceful and beneficial to all, can be continued," Gusmao told the Detective and Romantika weekly in its latest edition.

Mandela, who was granted a meeting with Gusmao when visiting Jakarta last month, has since called for the release of the East Timorese rebel who is serving a 20-year jail term here.

The release was essential to resolve the conflict in the former Portuguese colony, Mandela said.

New Russian cosmonaut crew to dock with Mir

MOSCOW, Aug 7: A spacecraft carrying two Russian cosmonauts will arrive Thursday night at the orbiting Mir to replace their weary counterparts and attempt tricky repairs on the battered space station, reports AP.

The Soyuz TM-26 spacecraft carrying cosmonauts Anatoly Solovoyov and Pavel Vinogradov is scheduled to dock with the Mir at 9:03 pm Moscow time (17:03 GMT). About 1 and half hours later the cosmonauts will open the hatch and enter Mir.

The two will be welcomed by a Russian-American crew that has endured a string of breakdowns and the worst accident in Mir's history, when a cargo ship rammed one of the modules during a practice docking. The new crew will attempt to repair the damage.

Another task will be to fix the oxygen generators. The aging system breaks down periodically, but Russian space officials say oxygen supplies remain plentiful despite the latest problems, which surfaced last week.

Still, the timing of the latest breakdown highlights the Mir's changing role — from scientific laboratory to repairs workshop. Even if the station's functions can be restored to near full capacity, Russian officials admit the patching won't keep the 11-year-old Mir in operation much longer than a couple more years.

A preliminary step toward vital repairs comes August 15, when an American astronaut Michael Foale fly the Soyuz TM-26 around the station and inspect damage done to the hull of the Spektr module when a cargo ship crashed into it June 25.

Fiji PM reshuffles cabinet

SUVA, Fiji, Aug 7: Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka reshuffled his Cabinet on Thursday, moving a finance minister criticised by Australia as "disappointing" to Foreign Affairs, and promoting a woman to deputy prime minister, reports AP.

One of Fiji's leading business entrepreneurs, Jim Ah Koy, was appointed finance minister, a promotion from his post as youth and sports minister.

He replaces Berenado Vunibobo, who becomes minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, a portfolio previously held by Felipe Bole.

Bole becomes minister for National Planning.

Vunibobo came in for withering criticism in a leaked secret document prepared for the recent South Pacific economic ministers' meeting in Cairns, Australia, in July.

He was described in the secret document as being disappointing, temperamentally volatile and still given to Third World posturing against Western colonialism.

In a rare departure from traditionally male-dominated politics in the Pacific, Education Minister Taufa Vakatale added the portfolio of deputy prime minister, a prime post for a woman.

The prime minister also included two members of the minority Fijian Association party to his government, dominated by Rabuka's own SVT party.

One is Ratu Finau Mara, who becomes minister for Fijian Affairs. He is the son of the current president, Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara.

The other is Viliame Cautati, who becomes assistant minister of Communications, Works, and Energy.

Hindus selling off properties in Kashmir

Sammer Koul, a Kashmiri Hindu who left his home here more than seven years ago and now lives in New Delhi, does not want to return to the land of his birth.

"My house in Kashmir has been burnt down. My children are studying in Delhi. I don't want to see them suffer like me," he said. A prosperous businessman in Kashmir, he now works for a private firm in Delhi.

He is firm that he will not return to Kashmir "even if I am given hundreds of thousands of rupees." "I am happy with my meagre income in Delhi. At least my future generation is safe," he said.

Several Kashmiri Pandits, as the Hindus there called and who are now revisiting the Valley, have one goal - to sell off their properties in Kashmir which are surprisingly fetching a high price. In Srinagar's main commercial centre Lal Chowk, nearly all shops which belonged to the Hindus have been sold to Muslims. A shop in Lal Chowk costs more than twice its about Rs 1,200,000 value seven years ago.

Nearly 200,000 Kashmiri Pandits migrated to other parts of country soon after the insurgency broke out in late 1989, leaving behind their material possessions.

Political and business observers here say this is a result of the large amounts of money being pumped into the Valley. They speak of Pakistani funding for two dozen-odd militant and political groups in Kashmir. At the same time, Indian counter-intelligence agencies are financing some anti-militant groups. Added to this are the about 250,000 soldiers who are like permanent tourists and buy nearly everything locally.

A delegation of Pannun Kashmir, an organisation of displaced Kashmiri Hindus, which visited Kashmir last month said, "the time is not ripe (for the Hindus) to return."

"The comprehensive and inadequate approach...to the problem of rehabilitation of displaced Kashmiri pundits doesn't take cognizance of the problem in totality," said a statement issued by Pannun Kashmir.

"Creation of refugee camps in the Valley for the Pandits was nothing but an attempt to bring this vulnerable sections of the community within reach of the militants," it added.

An opinion poll by a local weekly found that 76 per cent of Kashmiri Muslims want Kashmiri Hindus back. But another private opinion poll among the Kashmiri Hindus found that 75 percent of them did not want to return for the sake of the future of their children.

Sixty eight per cent Kashmiri Muslims believe that the Pandits betrayed them by running away from the militancy, while the Hindus blame Kashmiri Muslims for the exodus saying, "they always suspected them (Pandits)."

Some 48 per cent Muslims believe fear was the main reason for the Hindus to migrate while another 40 per cent blamed the government for encouraging the migration.

On March 21, 1997, seven Hindu men were killed in Budgam grampora village in Budgam district while six Hindu bus passengers were gunned down in village Gul Gulabgarh on June 15, 1997. The two incidents have forced Kashmiri Hindus to re-think plans of returning.

"Even those who had considered to return finally changed their plans after the killings," said Satish Kumar an engineer.

The state government has announced a Rs 28 billion rehabilitation package for the Hindu migrants who are to be resettled in three safe zones in the Valley.

India Abroad News Service

HR group to question Indonesian govt over riot in July '96

JAKARTA, Aug 7: The National Commission on Human Rights plans to question the Indonesian government over its handling of riots in Jakarta in July 1996, reports said today, says AFP.

Commission Vice Chairman Marzuki Darusman said it was "logical" to take up the Jakarta riots with the government as "there seems to be different views within the government about the commission's recommendation".

The Kompas Daily quoted Darusman as saying the commission will discuss the riots in a meeting with coordinating Minister for Political and Security Affairs Susilo Sudarman on August 20.

Sudarman said last week the case of the July 27 riots was already closed. And the government had already followed up on the riots and the findings of the commission's report.



Retired Gen Hugo Banzer Suarez gives a speech to the nation after being sworn in as president Wednesday in La Paz, following a congressional vote confirming his narrow ballot-box win. — AFP/UNB photo

Survivors give fiery description of Korean Air Flight 801

AGANA, Guam, Aug 7: Shaking, uncontrollable and inflames, Korean Air Flight 801 plummeted in a sudden, deadly free fall in the last seconds before hitting the ground and exploding, passengers and crew members said Thursday in the first accounts from the 29 survivors, reports AP.

Burned, scratched but alive, the fortunate ones among the 254 people aboard told of being thrown from the Boeing 747 still strapped into their seat, and of turning back in their escape from the burning jet to pull fellow passengers to safety.

"I felt the plane shake, and shake more, and then it was a sudden drop. It felt like there was no gravity," Song Yun-ho, 29, said from his bed at Guam's US Navy hospital, cut's raked across his face, arms and leg.

"When I woke up, the plane had crashed. The Boeing 747 from Seoul, South Korea, went down in driving rain Wednesday in a deep ravine three miles (five kilometres) from its airport destination on this US-governed Pacific island. Seventeen hours later, rescuers said they had found all the survivors.

Flight 801 was carrying mostly Korean tourists, including many families heading to Guam's tropical beaches for vacation. Also on board were 23 crew members and at least 13 Americans.

Hundreds of family members of those aboard arrived Wednesday in Guam, either to wait for authorities to identify the dead — for a few — to comfort injured loved ones.

"Thank God, you are alive. You are so lucky," father Song Jae-Young said Thursday, stroking Song's bandaged leg tenderly, urging the young man to stop struggling to raise himself up in bed in his father's presence.

The son had been headed to the island for a vacation with a friend. He told The Associated Press he survived by bolting from the burning wreckage seconds before it exploded into much fiercer flames.

Song told his father of turning back to pull out another passenger, saying he could not bear to leave him behind. The passenger also survived.

Flight attendant Oh Sang-hee, 25, lay in bed in another room at the hospital, face burned slightly and hair singed. Oh had felt the jet shaking more than usual throughout the flight, worrying her so at one point that she went to a window to look at the fuselage only to see flames surging.

The impact of the crash had jolted Oh from the jet still in her chair, her seatbelt wrapped around her.

"You have to repay for your life as long as you live," father Oh Gil-ho told the young woman at the hospital.

Sixty-nine bodies had been recovered from the wreckage by the time the rescue effort was called off for the night, said Ginger Cruz, a spokeswoman for Guam Gov Carl Gutierrez.

"We scoured the whole area all day today," Air Force Col Al Riggall said. "We know there are some bodies still down there, but it's smoldering too hot."

Many among the 300 relatives of Flight 801's injured and dead — flown in on several flights as a courtesy by Korean Air — wore black. They stared ahead numbly, ruddy faces damp with tears.

Two US Navy CH-46 Sea Knight helicopters rescued survivors, many of them burned. With the jet still burning, Navy Seabees moved in backpacks to crack open the fuselage.

The survivors, some of them severely injured, were being treated at two hospitals on the island. Burn experts were being flown in from the US mainland.

National Transportation Safety Board investigators were due to arrive later Thursday to examine the crash site in a thick, tropical underbrush where the plane went down, and officials from the Los Angeles County coroner's office were on their way to help process the dead, many charred beyond immediate recognition. The voice and flight-data recorders have been sent to Washington for analysis.

The survivors had been seated in the front of the plane, which was largely intact. But the plane's pilot and co-pilot were missing and presumed dead, the airline said.

"I join with all Americans in expressing our deepest condolences to the victims of the terrible plane crash in Guam," President Clinton told reporters in Washington, pledging assistance from the Federal Aviation Administration and other agencies as needed.

The Boeing 747-300, delivered used to Korean Air in 1984, had attempted a landing at an airport that lacked both a main landing system and a government-staffed control tower.

In western Japan on Wednesday, a Seoul-bound Korean Air Airbus A-300 developed engine trouble soon after taking off today from Kansai International Airport, forcing an emergency landing.