

Suicide bombings kill Israelis, jolt peace talks



KFAR DAROM, Gaza Strip (AP) — Islamic militants opposed to the Israeli-Palestine Liberation

Organization peace process killed six Israeli soldiers and wounded dozens of people in two suicide bombings Sunday near isolated Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin said he would continue talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization despite calls by right-wing opponents and some of his allies to halt them in protest.

In the first attack, a van parked by the main Gaza highway exploded near an Israeli bus at about noon, killing six soldiers, Brig said. Gen. Doron Almog, Israel's commander in Gaza. Officials said 34 people were wounded.

Two hours later, about six miles up the road, a Palestinian

car drove into an Israeli convoy of military and civilian cars and exploded, Almog said. Eleven Israelis were wounded, including two girls ages 2 and 4, and two soldiers who were in critical condition.

Three of those injured were Americans, said White House spokesman Mike McCurry, who was traveling with President Clinton in Los Angeles. McCurry wouldn't give their names and didn't say in which attack they were wounded.

One of those wounded in the first attack was identified as Alisa M. Flatow of West Orange, N.J., a Brandeis University junior on leave to study at a Jerusalem yeshiva. Her mother, Rosalyn Flatow, said her daughter was unconscious and on a respirator after surgery.

The militant group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the first attack and said it was carried out by Khaled Mohammed Khatib, a 24-year-old construc-

tion worker.

Sources in the group Hamas confirmed a report that the group's military wing, Izzedine al-Qassam, staged the second attack. They identified the suicide bomber as Imad Abu Amouna, also 24, from the Shati refugee camp.

More than 100 fundamentalist youths gathered at Khatib's home in the Nuseirat refugee camp, their cries for revenge mingling with the wails of women from inside the house and the crack of gunshots fired into the air.

"The language of bullets is the only one that will guarantee the departure of the enemy from our territory," said one Islamic Jihad activist through a loudspeaker.

PLO leader Yasser Arafat strongly condemned the attacks but did not say how he would respond. "We are committed to confronting terrorism," he said. "These people are the enemies of peace."

Palestinian police began arrest-

ing Islamic Jihad activists in Gaza City on Sunday evening.

In Washington, Clinton also condemned the attacks. "Those responsible must not and shall not be allowed to deny a better future of hope and reconciliation to the region," he said.

Israel Radio said Arafat called Rabin to offer condolences, and Rabin asked him to do more to rein in the militants.

Other Israeli leaders warned chances of reaching agreement on expanding Palestinian autonomy by a July 1 target date are slipping away. Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho became autonomous 11 months ago, and talks are underway to extend self-rule throughout the West Bank.

After the weekly Cabinet meeting, Education Minister Amnon Rubinstein said the July 1 deadline could be met only if Arafat declared "all-out war" on militants.

Rabin, who toured the bus bomb site as experts were still

blowing up suspicious objects, said however, "We won't stop the negotiations."

He also credited Israel's closure of its borders with Gaza and the West Bank in January with preventing such attacks inside Israel itself.

The closure, which has kept thousands of Palestinians from their jobs in Israel, was imposed after a suicide bomber killed 21 people in central Israel.

The bus was attacked Sunday near the fenced-in Kfar Darom settlement in the heart of autonomous Gaza. Witnesses said the blast ripped its side off and hurled bodies into the air. The twisted and blackened remains of a blue vehicle, apparently the van that held the explosives, lay nearby.

Reporters at the scene of the second explosion, near the isolated Netzarim settlement outside Gaza City, saw only the smoking remains of an Israeli army jeep and two Israeli cars.

U.S. dollar plunges to record low in Japan

TOKYO (AP) — The U.S. dollar plunged to a new record low early Monday, falling to just above 80 yen despite Japan's aggressive attempt to prop up the battered American currency.

Stocks rebounded from an early dip, closing the morning session higher.

By 11 a.m., the dollar touched 80.15 yen in Tokyo, its lowest level since modern exchange rates were established in the late 1940s. In a 90-minute nosedive, the dollar fell by more than 4 yen from 84.20 yen at late Friday on the Tokyo currency exchange market.

A few minutes after setting the record low, the dollar was back up to 81.60 yen.

"The dollar is facing massive waves of selling, and they're unstoppable," said Ayako Hashimoto, a Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank currency dealer.

A currency dealer for Sakura Bank said Japanese traders were selling dollars as the chances the United States might raise interest rates faded after a report Friday of rising U.S. unemployment.

Serbs hit with banned weapons

SARAJEVO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Rebel Serbs laying siege to Sarajevo are shooting at civilian neighborhoods with large-caliber weapons, which are supposed to be banned from around the capital, said the United Nations on Sunday.

The city's troubles and increased fighting in the countryside underscored the failure of diplomatic efforts to end Bosnia's 3-year-old war, despite a cease-fire that began Jan. 1. U.N. officials say it appears only late-winter snow has delayed a resumption of full-scale war.

Sarajevo was rocked by about a dozen explosions late Saturday and early Sunday, wounding two people. A U.N. investigation found at least six of the blasts were 120 mm mortar rounds fired by Bosnian Serbs, spokeswoman Capt. Myriam Sochacki said.

Two more shells landed in the center of town Sunday night, killing two people and wounding three more. Munevera Selimovic, 58, and an unidentified 15-year-old girl died in the blasts.

The Bosnian army blamed the explosions on 120 mm mortar shells fired from Serb positions north of the city.

Weapons of that size have been banned from a 12.5-mile zone around Sarajevo for more than a year, but not all of them have been removed.

U.N. officials said the center of the city, where the shells landed, did not have any military significance.

"There are no military objects in that area. It seems they were targeting civilians," said Sochacki, adding the United Nations protested to the Serbs.

The so-called "heavy-weapons exclusion zone" was imposed in February 1994 — under threat of NATO air strikes — after a single mortar exploded in a Sarajevo marketplace, killing more than 60 people.

Sarajevo airport remained closed Sunday with U.N. troops on high alert. A U.S. relief plane was hit by 10 bullets fired by Serbs Saturday, and they refused to promise to stop shooting.

"When they don't give guarantees, it means that they will most probably shoot at planes again," said a U.N. spokesman, Maj. Herve Gourmelon.

The city, surrounded by rebel Serbs, depends on the airport for most of its relief supplies.

Russians accused of atrocities

SERNOVODSK, Russia (AP) — Refugees who escaped one of the biggest battles of the war in Chechnya claimed Sunday that Russian troops committed atrocities and killed dozens of civilians over the weekend.

The claims could not immediately be confirmed because Russian forces stopped journalists and relief workers one mile west of the village of Samashky. Troops and rebels were still fighting there.

Several hundred Chechens who escaped from Samashky in recent days gathered Sunday in front of a mosque in the neighboring village of Sernovodsk to

wait for relatives and news from home. Many wailed as they told of atrocities in the village.

"She saw Russians pour gasoline over a father and his daughter and set them on fire," said 43-year-old Zina Akhmadova, indicating a young woman too dazed to speak. Akhmadova lost five of her seven children in the attack, she said.

Zayina Kurbanova, 40, fled with her family Sunday after the village was pounded for three days.

"In our cellar, there were about 20 women and children," she said. "We cried to the soldiers not to shoot. They just laughed and

shot at us."

A 16-year-old boy lay dead in the street, she said, his eyes plucked out. "It was horrible, but I saw it."

Other villagers said Russian soldiers threw grenades into cellars where civilians took shelter. Many said bodies littered the village; Kurbanova said she counted seven on her street alone.

Russian military helicopters buzzed through the conflict zone, some bearing the Red Cross emblem. A Russian officer said they were collecting the wounded. Villagers claimed they were removing evidence of a blood bath.

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of the 1986 Nobel Prize-winning International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, Dr. Caldicott stands out as the single most articulate and passionate advocate of citizen action to remedy the environmental crisis.

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