

British negotiate with hijackers

STANSTED, England (AP) — Authorities waged hours of “fairly calm and businesslike” negotiations Monday with apparent Afghan dissidents holding a planeload of at least 150 people hostage at an airport outside London.

Officials did not disclose what political demands, if any, the hijackers put forth. But a diplomat familiar with earlier negotiations said the hijackers sought to free a prisoner in Afghanistan.

Afghan media speculated the hijackers were Afghan dissidents who sought the release of Ismail Khan, a former regional governor who has been in captivity since 1997 by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement. Khan is a member of Afghanistan's opposition alliance, which rules about 10 percent of the war-shattered country.

Once in Britain, the hijackers requested only food, water, unspecified medical supplies and that the bathrooms on the Afghan state-run Ariana Airlines plane be emptied, said John Broughton, assistant chief constable of the Essex Police.

He characterized the negotiations,

conducted in English, as “fairly calm and businesslike” and said authorities were patiently working toward a peaceful solution.

“Negotiations remain our favorite option,” said Joe Edwards, another assistant chief constable. “I will say it could be a very protracted technique. It could go on for days.”

Mohammad Bashir Mahal, a passenger freed in Moscow, told reporters on Monday that the hijackers treated the passengers well.

“They were all young — around 25 to 30 years old, dressed in traditional Afghan costume — and to begin with they were threatening,” he said in Pashtu. “But slowly, their aggression subsided, and they treated us quite well. No one was beaten or insulted. Relations were good.”

Broughton said that eight captives released Monday at Stansted, Britain's designated airport for handling hijackings, “tell us they were very well-treated while they were on board.”

The Boeing 727 was seized by an unknown number of hijackers shortly after takeoff early Sunday on an Ariana flight from the Afghan capital,

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Joe Edwards
assistant chief constable

Kabul, headed to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif.

Before landing early Monday at Stansted, about 25 miles north of London, the hijackers had freed 22 hostages in return for supplies during earlier stops in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia.

Authorities said they could not confirm the nationalities of what were believed to be 157 hostages remaining on the airliner. They disclosed that one passenger has a serious kidney illness, but said they did not know if that person was among those released.

Broughton said Britain's Foreign Office was working in “close collaboration” with several other governments, but would not be more specif-

ic. He added that it wasn't Britain's policy “to allow aircraft to take off again once landed.”

Afghanistan's ruling Taliban said it would neither negotiate nor agree to the demands of the hijackers. A statement issued by the religious militia's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar, accused the head of an anti-Taliban alliance, Ahmed Shah Massoud, of masterminding the hijacking. The Taliban provided no evidence, however.

“We are watching this closely, waiting to hear what the demands are,” Taliban Foreign Ministry spokesman Faiz Ahmed Faiz said in Kabul.

Jurors chosen for Sam Sheppard case

CLEVELAND (AP) — Lawyers preparing to revisit the decades-old murder case of Dr. Sam Sheppard asked potential jurors 80 questions in Cuyahoga County Judge Ronald Suster's courtroom.

The eight jurors and four alternates are expected to spend more than a month hearing testimony and poring over test results to determine if Sheppard killed his wife 46 years ago.

Sam Reese Sheppard, the couple's only child, is suing the state in civil court, claiming his father was wrongfully imprisoned for his mother's death. Marilyn Sheppard was four months pregnant when she was killed at the couple's home on July 4, 1954.

The doctor was convicted of murder and spent 10 years in prison before he was acquitted at a retrial in 1966. He died four years later.

The new case is the result of Sheppard's effort to solve his mother's

murder and clear his father's name.

To win the lawsuit, Sheppard and his attorneys will have to convince the jury that the majority of evidence indicates the doctor was innocent.

The killing partly inspired the movie and TV series “The Fugitive.”

Sheppard's lawyers say DNA evidence can exclude the elder Sheppard as the killer, and they plan to implicate a window washer who worked for the Sheppards in 1954.

Sheppard's original conviction was overturned, and a new trial was ordered by the U.S. Supreme Court because the jury wasn't shielded from intense publicity surrounding the 1954 trial, which included the filming and photographing of the jury.

On Monday, the judge denied reporters access to biographical information about prospective jurors and banned the media from photographing or videotaping them.

Israel may pull out of Lebanon territory

■ In the wake of escalating violence, Israel may withdraw without Syrian agreement.

JERUSALEM (AP) — After a week of bloody attacks on their troops and graphic footage on the evening news, Israeli officials said Monday they may pull out of Lebanon soon — with or without an agreement with Syria.

In a sign of an impending escalation of the violence at the Israeli-Lebanon border, the army ordered residents of border towns into shelters. Ministers in Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Cabinet said it was becoming clear that a withdrawal without Syria's agreement was likely.

In 1985, Israel established a buffer zone in south Lebanon to protect nearby northern Israeli towns from guerrilla attacks. But Islamic Hezbollah guerrillas have been fighting to drive the Israelis out ever since, and Barak said last July 7 that Israel would withdraw within a year.

Barak had hoped a pullout would be through an agreement with Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon. But Israeli-Syrian peace talks broke down last month.

“There is no point in waiting until July, unless someone thinks that by then we can achieve an agreement (with Syria),” said Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, Barak's tourism minister and one of his lead Syria negotiators.

Barak's Police Minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, said Israelis should not rule out an earlier withdrawal.

Some warned that a unilateral withdrawal would be counterproductive, bringing the Hezbollah within firing range of the Israeli towns arrayed along the border.

“It's easy to call for a unilateral withdrawal when you don't consider what will happen the next day among the northern border communities,” said opposition Likud lawmaker Silvan Shalom.

But the dramatic details of the latest deaths and grisly footage of the fighting raised public pressure on

Barak to make good on his promise to get out.

On Monday, Barak significantly dropped the clause “with an agreement” when he repeated his pledge to meet the deadline. He also blames Syria for not restraining — possibly even encouraging — the Iranian-backed Hezbollah's intensified attacks.

This week and last, four Israeli soldiers and a senior officer in the Israel-allied South Lebanese Army died in Hezbollah attacks. On Sunday, a medic was killed while he was tending to three soldiers wounded in earlier firing. Throughout Monday, television stations repeated footage that included close-ups of the wounded soldiers being evacuated.

“Those who have harmed us will be harmed,” Barak said before leaving for a meeting with officials from northern-border towns.

Within minutes of the end of a meeting of Barak's Security Cabinet, both TV newscasts — citing government sources — said there would be “upgraded military action” within hours. In the past, that has signaled intensive artillery pounding of guerrilla targets in the strip Israel occupies in southern Lebanon.

That in turn usually invites guerrilla retaliation in the form of katyusha rockets aimed at northern-border towns. As soon as the army ordered people into shelters Monday night, residents fled the oft-hit town of Kiryat Shmona in convoys.

A unilateral Israeli pullback from Lebanon would likely be bloody. During a 1984-85 Israeli pullback, Hezbollah led attacks against Israeli troops, securing the new militia's reputation for toughness.

Hezbollah would be as motivated to hit withdrawing troops now as it was then. Heavy Israeli casualties would consolidate its image as the movement that drove out the occupier.

In a speech timed for prime-time newscasts, Barak told Israelis that they would have to “bite their lips in determination” to meet the July deadline — a warning that further violence was ahead.

World and Nation

Datelines

■ California

Four killed in Los Angeles

two-plane collision

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Two small planes collided over Los Angeles and dropped out of the clear, sunny sky Monday, one of them crashing in flames on a golf course.

No one on the ground was hurt. Two men were killed in the plane that plunged through power lines and landed on the golf course, and a couple believed to be in their 60s died in the other plane, which fell into the trees near busy Interstate 5, said Fire Department spokesman Bob Collis.

Both planes had been in contact with nearby Van Nuys Airport, but neither reported problems beforehand, said Federal Aviation Administration spokeswoman Kirsti Dunn.

■ Yugoslavia

Defense minister shot, killed

in Belgrade restaurant

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia (AP) — Yugoslav Defense Minister Pavle Bulatovic was shot Monday in a Belgrade restaurant, officials and Belgrade media reported. Military officials said he died later in a hospital.

The independent Studio B television said Bulatovic, a Montenegrin who was close to Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, was in the restaurant of the soccer club Rad when he was shot along with two other people.

Military officials and those close to Bulatovic's Socialist Peoples' Party said the defense minister died in Belgrade military hospital.

■ Russia

Russians believed to have

killed 300 fleeing rebels

URUS-MARTAN, Russia (AP) — Russian forces claimed Monday to have killed hundreds of rebels trying to flee to the mountains of southern Chechnya, where the militants say they are regrouping to wage a guerrilla war.

About 300 militants were killed in the past two days near the villages of Katyr-Yurt and Shaami-Yurt, southwest of the capital of Grozny, said Sergei Yastrzhembsky, an aide to acting Russian President Vladimir Putin.

“Militants have left their comrades' bodies on the battlefield, having no time to dig graves for them,” Yastrzhembsky told reporters in Moscow.

■ Austria

Haider says he wants to stay a

provincial politician

KLAGENFURT, Austria (AP) — Joerg Haider said Monday that he is happy — for now — to remain a provincial politician instead of leading Austria in comments meant to defuse foreign fears that he will soon be pushing to become the country's chancellor.

“We are an open country,” Haider proclaimed in televised appearances on U.S. morning talk shows.

Over coffee and sandwiches, he told foreign reporters he has apologized for past praise of the Nazi era, said Israel will soon become a friend and joked that the only thing President Clinton has to fear is losing against him in the New York Marathon.

But even amid the charm offensive, Haider again demonstrated his other side — he refused to condemn collectively the Waffen SS, in comments made to the German daily Die Welt.

“I believe there can be no collective exoneration from guilt or partial guilt and no collective condemnation,” Haider was quoted as saying in an interview for publication today.

WEATHER	
TODAY	TOMORROW
Sunny high 59, low 36	Partly cloudy high 62, low 32

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Fax number: (402) 472-1761
World Wide Web: www.dailynebraskan.com
The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year, weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.
Subscriptions are \$60 for one year.
Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 20, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.
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