

US probes fatal beating of black man

AP, Cincinnati

A civilian watchdog panel born from riots that followed the shooting of an unarmed black man in 2001 is looking into another death this time, a black man died after wrestling with six officers trying to subdue him.

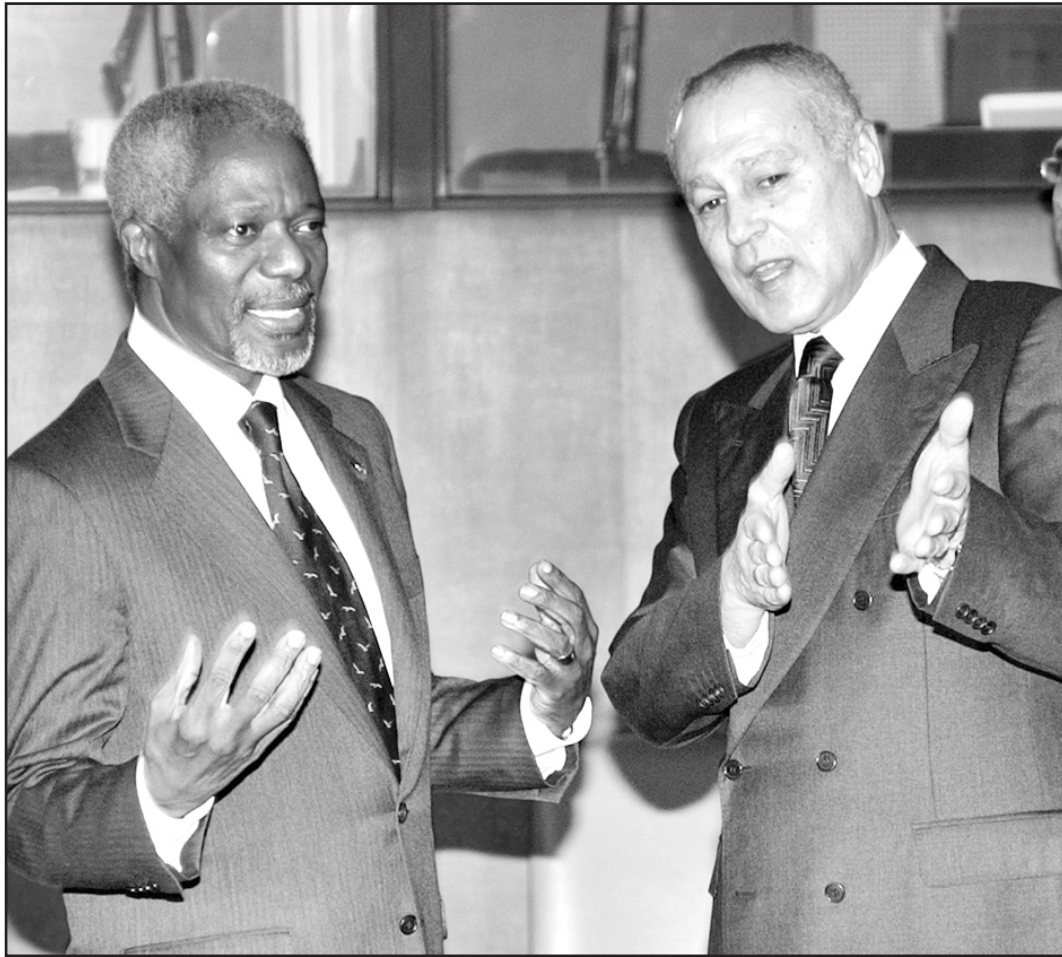
Nathaniel Jones, 41, died at a hospital shortly after being taken into custody Sunday. The 350-pound man was struck repeatedly with nightsticks in a confrontation captured by police cruiser video camera.

The cause of Nathaniel Jones' death was under investigation. Preliminary autopsy results showed he had an enlarged heart, and his blood contained cocaine and PCP, or "angel dust," both of which can cause erratic behavior.

The Citizen Complaint Authority, created after the 2001 riots, was already looking into the death, with investigators going to the parking lot of a fast food restaurant where the beating took place hours later, panel chairwoman Nancy Minson said.

She said the complaint board began its investigation on its own, which it can do when a death involves police or when shots are fired.

"We turn to you for a full and fair and thorough investigation," Mayor Charlie Luken told members Monday night.



United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan (L) talks with the Egyptian Ambassador to the UN, Aboul Gheit (R) on Monday at UN headquarters in New York. Annan was meeting with the Iraq Advisory Group, composed of the UN ambassadors from seventeen countries.

PHOTO: AFP

US Supreme Court to rule if US can grab foreigners

AFP, Washington

The US Supreme Court agreed Monday to consider whether federal agents have the right to enter foreign countries to arrest alleged criminals to be put on trial in the United States.

The high court's move followed a decision by a lower court to grant damages to a Mexican doctor picked up in his own country by US agents who believed he was involved in the murder of a US agent in 1985.

US authorities say the doctor Humberto Alvarez-Machain was in the residence where the US agent had been captured by drug traffickers and then was killed.

In January a California court issued an arrest warrant for Alvarez-Machain, accusing him of taking part in the torture and killing of the US agent.

US authorities say that when Mexico declined to hand over the physician, the FBI launched an operation to pick him up and bring him back for trial.

The suspect, who spent two years in a US federal prison, was not convicted in a US court and was granted damages and interest in a decision contested by the US government.

Doubts over bodies of slain Iraqis

'Saddam organising Iraq attacks'

AFP, Samarra

The centre of the Iraqi town of Samarra was left devastated after ambushes of US troops sparked a massive response in which the military claimed 54 insurgents killed, but the only bodies were of eight civilians, according to the local hospital.

Elsewhere in Iraq, a US soldier died of wounds he sustained when Iraqi gunmen attacked an army convoy on Monday near Habbaniyah, west of Baghdad, the US military said, taking the toll in combat in the past seven months to 187.

Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, the US-led coalition's deputy director of operations in Iraq, said in Baghdad after Sunday's attacks, "There were 54 estimated killed, 22 estimated wounded and one confirmed in detention."

But he admitted the toll for Samarra was based on troop debriefings, saying, "The reports that we have are from initial battlefield reports."

Challenged about what had happened to the bodies of the 54 militants said to have been killed,

Kimmitt said: "I would suspect that the enemy would have carried them away and brought them back to where their initial base was."

Asked about reports from senior police and hospital officials in the town of eight civilians killed and dozens more wounded, he insisted: "We have no such reports whether from medical authorities or police."

"We don't have any reports of collateral damage or killing or wounding of innocent civilians. If we get these reports, they will be included in the investigation."

The general acknowledged that the one insurgent now confirmed in custody was a sharp reduction on the 11 claimed captured by the commanding colonel in Samarra earlier in the day.

"Some of those early reports might have been a bit off," he said.

Kimmitt also sought to play down earlier reports that many of the attackers wore the uniforms of the disbanded Saddam Fedayeen militia of the ousted regime.

In Samarra, Captain Andy Deponai said the attacking force had been split into two groups of "anything from 30 to 40 individuals

at each bank site".

"They split down to team- and squad-size elements so they could attack from all sides," he said. "They had pre-prepared explosives and improvised explosives on our route which we took into the city."

Colonel Fredrick Rudesheim, commander of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, vowed to "continue to take the fight to this enemy," slaming as "disinformation" charges by Iraqi police, hospital and municipal officials in Samarra that his troops fired indiscriminately.

Meanwhile, a member of the US-installed Iraqi Governing Council said Monday that he believed ousted leader Saddam Hussein was organising the attacks against US forces and their allies in Iraq.

"Yes, he is behind these attacks," Jalal Talabani, a prominent Kurdish politician who headed the body last month, told France's state-owned France 2 television.

"He is financing them... and is giving these funds to terrorists that he is bringing in from abroad," Talabani charged.

Nepal upbeat about Saarc summit

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa returned from a regional tour yesterday upbeat about a delayed South Asian summit amid easing tension between India and Pakistan.

Thapa said he had "successful" talks with leaders of Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka about resolutions to be passed at the January 4-6 summit in Islamabad.

"I got full assurances from them on agreements on the alleviation of poverty, the control of drugs and the control of terrorism," Thapa told reporters at Kathmandu airport.

The seven-nation South Asian summit was due to be held in January 2003 but host Pakistan postponed it after India hesitated to confirm its attendance.

India and Pakistan last week reached a ceasefire over their borders in divided Kashmir and Monday agreed to resume flights between the two countries from January 1.

"This has generated a very good atmosphere," Thapa said, adding that Pakistan International Airlines would "soon" be able to resume flights to Nepal.

Thapa is the outgoing chairman

of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation because Nepal hosted the last summit in January 2002.

The prime minister said he planned visits to Bangladesh and Maldives, the other two members of the regional bloc, before the Islamabad summit.

Earlier Nepalese Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa held talks with Pakistan's leaders ahead of next month's South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) summit, an official said.

Thapa, the current Saarc chairman, met President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali after arriving for a two-day visit, a foreign ministry spokesman said in a statement.

Thapa met Musharraf "for an exchange of views on bilateral and Saarc-related issues," the spokesman said.

"The president (Musharraf) emphasised that the Saarc summit should take place on a regular basis ... and should not be held hostage to the whims of any one country," he said.

Jamali briefed Thapa about the arrangements for the summit in Islamabad from January 4-6.

Cong-BJP spat over exit poll

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

There is anxiety in the camp of India's main opposition Congress Party and chuckle in ruling BJP after television news channels came out with exit polls soon after elections for new legislatures in four key states but neither party is showing it.

The only thing that most of the exit polls have projected is Congress win in Delhi and BJP victory in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh.

With regard to the other two states Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, most exit polls have predicted a neck-and-neck race and declined to forecast which party is going to emerge as the largest party which is called to form government.

If indeed, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh witness a fractured verdict with a hung assembly, it will trigger a hot race between Congress and BJP for formation of a coalition government.

In fact, top leaders of the two parties are already holding informal strategy discussions to deal with the emerging scene in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. And central to the strategy is how to woo successful candidates of small regional parties and a sizable number of rebel nominees of both the parties if they emerge victoriously.

Hutton inquiry refuses to allow Blair to see report in advance

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair will have no advance warning of a report, expected early next year, into the death of British weapons expert David Kelly, London's Financial Times said yesterday.

Senior judge Brian Hutton has refused to send drafts of his report to ministers, officials, and others, including the BBC -- expected to be the subject of his criticism -- the Financial Times reported.

"It's going to come as a bolt out of the blue," said a government official quoted in the newspaper.

"We're being given no advance warning at all," the official said.

Hutton is expected to submit his report to Charles Falconer, constitutional affairs secretary, early next year.

The Financial Times said that January 12 had been touted as a possible publication date and that the government would be unlikely to delay it for risk of being accused of a cover-up.

The report will come months after Hutton and several lawyers quizzed Blair and other key government and BBC figures about the

events that led to Kelly's presumed suicidal death in July.

Kelly, 59, a defence ministry expert on Iraq's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and a former UN inspector in Iraq, was the anonymous source of the BBC report which alleged that Downing Street had "sexed up" intelligence in the run-up to the Iraq war.

In particular, the report challenged the most sensational claim in a September 2002 dossier on Iraq that Blair put before parliament -- that Iraq could deploy chemical or biological weapons in as little as 45 minutes.

Downing Street insisted the BBC retract the story. It refused. In the row that ensued, Kelly was exposed as its source and forced to face aggressive questioning before a parliamentary committee.

Within days, a despondent Kelly left his home in Oxfordshire for a walk, slit his wrist and bled to death, leaving no suicide note.

The discovery of his body on July 18 hurled Blair, then embarking on a tour of East Asia, into the most serious crisis of his six years in office.



PHOTO: AFP

A firefighter makes his way down a flooded street in the Barasse area of Marseille, France yesterday. Heavy downpours hit France Monday night and continued unabated throughout the night bringing havoc to many parts of the country.

Keep Zimbabwe isolated, UK urges C'wealth

REUTERS, London

Britain will urge fellow Commonwealth members to keep up pressure on its former colony Zimbabwe by maintaining a punitive suspension of Robert Mugabe's government at a summit in Nigeria later this week.

"It is important the Commonwealth maintains the position it has adopted because it is sending a very clear message about upholding values to which we all subscribe," International Development Secretary Hilary Benn told Reuters late Monday.

The minister will travel with Prime Minister Tony Blair -- a bete noire to President Mugabe -- to the meeting of the 54-nation group of mainly former British colonies over the weekend.

Although trade, AIDS and other global issues will figure, the Commonwealth summit looks set to be dominated by the controversial suspension of Zimbabwe since 2002 when Mugabe was accused by some observers of rigging his own re-election.

The issue has split the group along broadly racial grounds, with Britain and Australia leading the anti-Mugabe camp and South Africa and Nigeria seeking a softer line.

In classic brinkmanship fashion, a furious Mugabe has threatened to quit the Commonwealth altogether.

"We don't want it to dominate the summit because there are lots of other things we want to talk about," said Benn.

But he added: "It's about

upholding (democratic) principles which the Commonwealth holds very dear. The fact is that Zimbabwe is in the position that it finds itself in and will remain so because the situation in the country has actually got worse since that decision (suspension) was taken."

Benn said Zimbabwe's crisis, including mass hunger, was a damning indictment of mismanagement in the one-time southern African bread-basket, ruled by Mugabe since the former Rhodesia won independence from Britain in 1980.

"If 25 years ago you would have said that Zimbabwe would need food aid and the international community would be responsible for two-thirds of it, people would have said 'what are you talking about?'"

Support for Georgian rebels Powell implicitly warns Russia

AFP, Maastricht

US Secretary of State Colin Powell yesterday implicitly warned Russia against supporting separatists in Georgia, and expressed his backing for Georgia's new leader.

"No support should be given to breakaway elements seeking to weaken the territorial integrity of Georgia," he said in a clear reference to Russia's support for separatist movements in the country, without naming Moscow.

The opposition seized power in Tbilisi November 23 in a bloodless revolution. Since then Russia tried to increase its grip on the former Soviet republic by hosting top representatives from Georgia's separatist regions South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Adjara, who have refused to deal with the new lead-

ers.

"The international community should do everything possible to support Georgia's territorial integrity throughout and beyond the elections," Powell told delegates at a ministerial meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Maastricht.

Powell also lashed out against Russia for not fulfilling its international commitments to fully withdraw its troops from Georgia and Moldova, another former Soviet republic struggling dealing with a breakaway province, Transdniestr.

In a final swipe at Moscow he said that "Russia must ensure respect for human rights even as it combats terrorism and upholds its territorial integrity" in the rebel province of Chechnya.



PHOTO: AFP

India's Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (R) is greeted by a gift of flowers from Parliamentary Affairs and Health Minister Sushma Swaraj as he arrives for the opening day of the winter session of parliament at Parliament House in New Delhi yesterday. The first day of the parliament session was adjourned out of respect for the late Union Commerce Minister Murali Manan who died on November 23.

'Geneva plan shows peace is possible, but still elusive'

AFP, Paris

European newspapers welcomed the Geneva Initiative yesterday as proof that peace between Israelis and Palestinians is possible, but cautioned it would succeed only when officials embrace it.

Rome's daily La Repubblica, the Dutch left-wing Trouw and the leading Czech paper Lidove Noviny all dubbed it "a virtual plan" that has not been signed by anyone currently in office.

But, like other Italian papers including La Stampa and Corriere della Sera, La Repubblica said "peace in the Middle East is possible".

The Barcelona daily La Vanguardia hailed "the bold solutions it proposes" to problems such

as the creation of a Palestinian state and the status of Jerusalem, which have eluded peace-makers for half a century.

In contrast, the internationally-backed roadmap to peace looks like an initiative that nobody believes in anymore," La Vanguardia said.

The left-leaning Paris daily Liberation also welcomed the plan, the fruit of two years of secret contacts between leading Palestinian and Israeli opposition politicians and intellectuals and backed by dozens of former world leaders such as Jimmy Carter, US president from 1976 to 1980.

"Unofficial diplomacy was probably needed to break out of the bloody circle in which Israelis and Palestinians were trapped," Liberation said.