

## Deadly cartoon riots kill 16 in Nigeria

REUTERS, Lagos

Deadly protests over cartoons of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) spread in Africa, killing 16 people in Nigeria on Saturday a day after claiming 11 lives in Libya.

Many of those who died in northern Nigeria were Christians, killed after a Muslim protest over the cartoons turned violent and rioters torched churches, shops and vehicles, police and local officials said.

It was the bloodiest protest so far over satirical cartoons of the Prophet, first published in a Danish newspaper, that Muslims regard as blasphemous.

"They went on the rampage, burning shops and churches of

the Christians. The protesters killed the others. Some were even killed in the churches," said Joseph Hayab, north-west secretary of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN).

The row over the cartoons also forced two ministers out of their jobs in Europe and the Middle East after 11 people died in the Libyan town of Benghazi in clashes on Friday between police and protesters who had tried to storm the Italian consulate.

Italian Reforms Minister Roberto Calderoli, who had the cartoons made into a T-shirt which he wore on television, resigned after he was widely blamed for the violence in Libya.

## Quiet search for signs of life in mud

AFP, Guinsaugon

Tired mud-caked rescuers carefully set down a bloated cadaver on a blue tarpaulin in this once vibrant Philippine farming village.

Everyone speaks in hushed voices, hoping to hear any signs of life from under the hundreds of tonnes of wet earth and boulders that cascaded down the mountain of Guinsaugon before lunchtime Friday.

Only 64 bodies have been recovered so far. Estimates of the number of people still buried range from 1,400 to between 2,000 and 3,000, and hopes are fading that any of them are still alive.

An early morning drizzle fails to discourage a swarm of flies, while

health workers clean the body using water fetched from the nearby river.

"The mud is like quicksand. It is very deep and you have to be very careful," Army Major General Bonifacio Ramos, who is heading the overall rescue effort, says at a makeshift command post.

"Because of the low pressure area that is causing rains, we can't move very fast and it's very difficult to bring in advanced heavy equipment because it may just get sucked into the mud."

Rescue teams, roping themselves together and using only shovels, have been working very slowly because the mud is constantly shifting.

"Careful with your footing, that

area is very deep, very deep!", one rescuer shouts belatedly at a group of local volunteers, one of whom gets sucked waist deep into the muck.

He is quickly pulled out by his companions but they are told not to proceed any further -- the trail they had just taken has vanished.

The military says up to 30 feet (nine metres) of mud -- deeper in some places -- has buried the village, covering an area of nine square kilometres (3.5 square miles).

The one-time lush rice paddies and the buildings have been obliterated except for the occasional tin roof and treetops jutting from the mud.

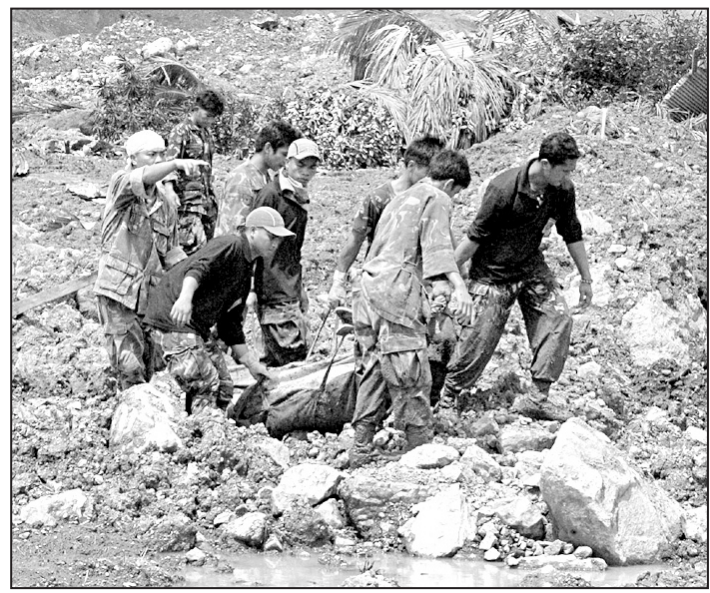


PHOTO: AFP

Search and rescue teams struggle through mud as they retrieve a body yesterday from the devastated village of Guinsaugon, in the central Philippines. Two days after the tragedy hope was dimming for at least 1,500 people still buried in the mud in one of the Philippines' biggest tragedies.

## Saudi dailies publish Danish paper's cartoon apology

REUTERS, Riyadh

Saudi Arabian newspapers yesterday printed an apology by the Danish paper whose cartoons lampooning Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) have sparked deadly protests around the world.

"Allow me in the name of Jyllands-Posten to apologize for what happened and declare my strong condemnation of any step that attacks specific religions, ethnic groups and peoples. I hope that with this I have removed the misunderstanding," wrote Carsten Juste, the editor of Jyllands-Posten.

The full-page advertisements appeared in Asharq al-Awsat, which is printed around the Arab world, as well as the local al-Riyadh and al-Jazira.

## French president in India for nuke talks

AFP, New Delhi

French President Jacques Chirac arrived in India yesterday for a whistle-stop visit aimed at bolstering trade and civilian nuclear cooperation with the emerging economic powerhouse.

Chirac arrived mid-afternoon on a special aircraft at a military base adjacent to New Delhi's main airport accompanied by his wife Bernadette.

He was to meet members of the French business community here Sunday before beginning the brief formal leg of his trip on Monday, when he will hold talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other leaders.

Chirac, whose visit will be followed by the arrival of US President George Bush in early March, has said he will seek to boost slim trade levels with Asia's third-largest economy where growth is running at an eight percent clip.

Accompanied by five cabinet ministers and a business delegation, the French president, who arrived in India after a visit to Thailand, said one of his aims was to "develop economic exchanges and boost them significantly".

Fuel-hungry India and France, which relies on nuclear power for its energy needs, will also discuss future civilian nuclear technology cooperation.

## Ahmedabad on high alert after blast

AFP, Ahmedabad

India's western Ahmedabad city was placed on high alert yesterday after 25 people were injured, three of them seriously, in a bomb blast at the main railway station, police said.

"It was a bomb blast. It was meant to create panic and terror. Whether it was a handiwork of terrorist outfits is not clear," said A.K. Bhargava, police chief of Gujarat state, which includes Ahmedabad.

He said that powerful explosives were used for the blast, but the impact was limited as there were no trains at the station early morning when it was detonated.

## UN ENVOY SAYS Human rights situation worsening in Myanmar

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar has made no transition towards democracy and the humanitarian situation is worsening under the military government, a UN's rights envoy said in his final report to the world body.

In an advance draft of the report released Sunday, Paolo Sergio Pinheiro, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, said the country had made "no progress towards instituting genuine democratic reform".

"Throughout the six-year period

of his mandate, the Special Rapporteur received substantial reports of grave human rights violations on an ongoing basis," Pinheiro said in his report.

"The intimidation, harassment, arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of civilians for peacefully exercising their civil and political rights and freedoms continue."

In November 2003, Pinheiro met with detained democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi at her lakeside residence in central Yangon but has since been denied entry to the country by the military government.

## EU to make new nuke appeal to Iran

REUTERS, Brussels

European officials will make a fresh appeal to Iran today to halt sensitive nuclear activities, warning its foreign minister on a rare trip to Brussels that the West is fast running out of patience.

The visit by Manouchehr Mottaki comes after Tehran last week resumed uranium enrichment in defiance of possible sanctions in the UN Security Council, and despite talks due next week on a Russian offer to enrich uranium on Iran's behalf.

Tensions have been fuelled by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent verbal onslaughts on Israel and Western suspicions that Iran has deliberately stoked up Muslim anger over cartoons of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) published in European newspapers.

"It is very important we repeat to Mr Mottaki the position of the EU on a range of issues -- nuclear, the Middle East peace process, democracy and human rights,"

said a spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, who will meet Mottaki.

"We want a suspension of enrichment, adherence to the Additional Protocol (allowing snap UN inspections of nuclear sites) and a change in tone," said Geoffrey van Orden, a senior member of the European Parliament foreign affairs committee.

"What we can't allow is that they think they can drive a wedge between Europe and the United States," said British conservative van Orden, whose committee will receive Mottaki for a potentially abrasive question-and-answer session.

The UN nuclear watchdog voted this month to report Iran to the Security Council over fears -- denied by Tehran -- that it is trying to build an atomic bomb, after 2-1/2 years of European diplomacy with Tehran reached a dead end.

Mottaki will also hold talks during the one-day trip with EU External Relations Commissioner

Benita Ferrero-Waldner and with Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht.

EU officials see the timing of the visit as no coincidence given the new depths which Iran's relations with the West have plumbed in recent weeks, and regard it as an effort by Tehran to defend its policy before a wide European audience.

With Mottaki not seen as a key player on the nuclear case, Solana and other EU officials will use the visit to urge Iran to cease alleged contacts with Islamic groups listed by the EU as terrorist organisations and raise concerns over human rights.

The EU in December accused Iran of a catalogue of abuses ranging from media censorship through to child executions and has been angered by Tehran's failure to stop attacks by protesters on European missions in Iran.

"It is unacceptable that leaders do not do the absolute maximum to halt the violence," said Solana's spokeswoman.



PHOTO: AFP

A Palestinian youth runs after lobbing stones at Israeli troops during clashes triggered by a search operation for militants and weapons in the Balata refugee camp close to the northern West Bank city of Nablus yesterday. Israel declared yesterday that it would regard the incoming Palestinian government led by the radical Islamists of Hamas as a terrorist regime and imposed a series of sanctions.

## Suicide bombers warn US, UK of attacks

AP, Tehran

An Iranian group that claims its members are dedicated to becoming suicide bombers warned the United States and Britain on Saturday that they will strike coalition military bases in Iraq if Tehran's nuclear facilities are attacked.

Mohammad Ali Samadi, spokesman for Esteshadion, or Martyrdom Seekers, boasted of having hundreds of potential bombers in his talk at a seminar on suicide-bombings tactics at Tehran's Khajeh Nasir University.

"With more than 1,000 trained martyrdom-seekers, we are ready to attack the American and British sensitive points if they attack Iran's nuclear facilities," Samadi said.

"If they strike, we have a lot of volunteers. Their (US and British)

sensitive places are quiet close to Iranian borders," Samadi said.

Samadi reviewed the history of suicide bombing as a weapon, praising it as the most effective Palestinian tactic in their confrontation with Israel.

The organisers showed video clips of suicide attacks against Israelis, including one in the Morag settlement near Rafah in Gaza strip in February 2005. One settler, three Israeli soldiers and the two attackers were killed in the attack.

Hasan Abbasi, a university instructor and former member of the elite Revolutionary Guards, told the audience of about 200 that Iran was not seeking nuclear weapons as claimed by the United States and some of its allies.

"Our martyrdom-seekers are our nuclear weapons," said Abbasi, the event's main speaker.