



Women stand in front of Armavia airline office at Yerevan airport to read the passenger list of those killed in the Airbus A320 plane that crashed yesterday into the Black Sea off the Russian resort of Sochi as it tried to land in bad weather at a nearby airport, killing all 113 people on board.

2 die as gunmen storm Lankan newspaper office

AFP, Colombo

Gunmen stormed a Tamil newspaper office in Sri Lanka's Jaffna peninsula killing two people and further raising the toll in the bloodiest month since a 2002 truce took effect, officials said yesterday.

The late Tuesday night attack, on the eve of International Press Freedom Day celebrations, left two people working in the office dead, Media Minister Anura Yapa said in a statement.

Journalists and officials initially said only one person died and three others were wounded when masked men opened fire inside the Uthayan newspaper office in Jaffna, 400km north of the capital Colombo.

Yapa did not give any figure for the number of injured and it was not immediately clear if one of those hurt had later died from their wounds.

Western powers make case on Iran to UNSC

AFP, REUTERS, United Nations

US, British and French diplomats have drafted a binding UN Security Council resolution requiring Iran to stop critical nuclear activities, the New York Times reported yesterday.

However Russia and China, which are major trading partners with oil-rich Iran, are resisting the resolution, the Times reported, quoting officials involved in the negotiations.

The three nations will introduce the resolution in New York on Wednesday or Thursday, Nicholas Burns, the number three in the US State Department and the point man in the US diplomatic effort on Iran, told the newspaper.

But the Western allies probably will not distribute a text that Russia and China still oppose. Moscow and Beijing fear it would be a step toward sanctions or even military action,

although the draft will not threaten either measure.

"We will be explaining to the full council at that point where our thoughts are and what direction they will take," US Ambassador John Bolton told reporters of the Wednesday afternoon council consultations.

He said it would be "helpful to apply greater pressure on Iran" so that all 15 members of the council, not just the Western powers, could give their views.

The plan is to introduce shortly a resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, making legally binding a March council statement that asked Iran to suspend uranium enrichment work -- a process that could be used for electricity generation or making an atomic weapon.

There would be a deadline for Iran to comply but the measure would not

threaten any action. Chapter 7 allows for sanctions or even military action but a separate resolution is necessary to specify either step.

No vote has been scheduled. The text also will be under discussion at a meeting on Monday and Tuesday among the foreign ministers of Germany and the five permanent council members -- the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China.

Iran maintains its nuclear programme is legal and that it does not seek a bomb. It has accelerated uranium enrichment but is still far below the level needed to make an atomic bomb.

As a follow-up resolution, the Western allies have considered targeted sanctions to ratchet up the pressure in hopes of Russian and Chinese support if Iran continues to defy the council's demands.



Pramod Mahajan dies after tough battle for survival

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Mumbai

Bharatiya Janata Party leader Pramod Mahajan, who was shot and wounded by his brother in a fit of rage, succumbed to his bullet wounds in Mumbai yesterday after battling for life for 12 days.

Mahajan, 56, breathed his last after developing complications from the penetrating injuries caused by the three bullets his younger brother Pravin had fired from a revolver from close range.

Pramod Mahajan seemingly showed some improvement in the past few days at the PD Hinduja Hospital, where he was admitted on April 22 soon after the sensational shooting, but his condition deteriorated suddenly on Tuesday night.

Delhi asks Modi to curb violence in Vadodara

PTI, REUTERS, New Delhi/Ahmedabad

In a firm message to the Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat, the Centre on Wednesday asked the state to take all necessary steps to ensure that violence ends in Vadodara, saying the Union Government was closely watching the situation and will ensure that it is brought under control.

"I don't think that these kind of situations can remain uncontrolled. The state government has to do it and we will see that it is done," Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil told reporters in New Delhi.

The Gujarat government has been asked to take all necessary actions to control the situation and not to leave any stone unturned.

Violence overshadows Kashmir peace talks

AFP, New Delhi

Kashmiri separatists met India's prime minister yesterday for fresh peace talks on the future of Kashmir after 35 Hindus were massacred in an apparent attempt to thwart negotiations.

The talks at Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's official residence with moderate leaders of the Hurriyat or "Freedom" alliance are the second since he took office two years ago and have been planned for months.

But the massacre cast a cloud ahead of the meeting.

On Sunday, suspected militants

gunned down 35 Hindu villagers in Kashmir in the worst such massacre since 2000.

Analysts warned against high expectations from the talks as troops combed densely forested areas of revolt-hit Indian Kashmir hunting for the killers.

"It's going to be a long haul -- don't expect dramatic results but the fact they have come with no set agenda is a good sign they want to talk," said S. Chandrasekharan, of New Delhi's South Asia Analysis Group.

New Delhi "is not going to be deflected" by the massacre, he added.

"If the government stopped talking it would give them (the killers) what they want."

Hours before the talks were due to begin, four rebels and three security men died in gunbattles in Kashmir, the army said.

Violence has risen in Kashmir despite two years of peace talks between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan. The talks have made progress on people-to-people contacts and trade but little on the disputed region, trigger of two of their wars.

Torture 'widespread' under US custody Says Amnesty

REUTERS, Geneva

Torture and inhumane treatment are "widespread" in US-run detention centres in Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba and elsewhere despite Washington's denials, Amnesty International said yesterday.

In a report for the United Nations' Committee against Torture, the London-based human rights group also alleged abuses within the US domestic law enforcement system, including use of excessive force by police and degrading conditions of

isolation for inmates in high security prisons.

"Evidence continues to emerge of widespread torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment of detainees held in US custody," Amnesty said in its 47-page report.

It said that while Washington has sought to blame abuses that have recently come to light on "aberrant soldiers and lack of oversight," much ill-treatment stemmed from officially sanctioned interrogation procedures and techniques.

"The US government is not only failing to take steps to eradicate torture, it is actually creating a climate in which torture and other ill-treatment can flourish," said Amnesty International USA Senior Deputy Director-General Curt Goering.

The UN committee, whose experts carry out periodic reviews of countries signatory to the UN Convention against Torture, is scheduled to begin consideration of the United States on Friday. The last US review was in 2000.

Nepal declares truce with Maoist rebels

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's new interim government yesterday called a ceasefire in the nation's decade-long conflict with Maoist rebels, Deputy Premier K.P. Sharma Oli said.

"We have decided to announce a ceasefire and remove the terrorist tag" from the Maoists, Oli told reporters after the first cabinet meeting of the new government.

The Maoists began their "people's war" in 1996 to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic. At least 12,500 people have died.

The Maoists last week declared a three-month ceasefire after King Gyanendra backed down following weeks of public protests against his absolute rule and recalled parliament for the first time since 2002.

The government's last ceasefire started in January 2003 but only held for a few months before hostilities resumed.

Constant battles between the rural-based Maoists and the security forces have resulted in a stalemate.

Analysts say the Maoists do not have the ability to take the government's urban centres while the under-equipped army cannot defeat them in their often mountainous rural strongholds.

