

4 killed in stampede at Indian temple

AFP, Bhubaneswar

At least four people were killed and 25 injured yesterday in a stampede at a temple festival in eastern India where thousands of people had gathered to worship, officials said.

The victims were among a massive crowd of Hindu devotees thronging the entrance to the massive 12th-century Jagannath temple in the coastal city of Puri, 65km south of Orissa state capital Bhubaneswar.

"Four have people died in the stampede. The government has ordered a judicial inquiry into the incident," said Orissa Law Minister Biswabhusan Harichandan. Chief temple administrator Suresh Mohapatra told AFP at least 25 people were injured in the crush, 10 of them seriously.

The stampede, involving mostly elderly people, occurred on a narrow set of stairs leading to the inner sanctum of the temple, one of the most revered Hindu shrines in India.

Russia to back limited Iran sanctions: FM

Tehran test-fires more new weapons

AP, AFP, Moscow/ Tehran

Russia's foreign minister said yesterday that Moscow would only support sanctions against Iran if they were for a limited time and spelled out a clear mechanism for lifting them, Russian news agencies reported.

Russia proposed major amendments weakening a European draft resolution on Iran at the United Nations on Friday, saying it wanted sanctions limited to measures that would keep Tehran from developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in order to leave the door open for negotiations.

The US and its Western allies see the sanctions as a means of gradually ratcheting up pressure on

Iran, and have not ruled out further punitive measures if the Islamic republic remains unyielding over demands to curb its controversial nuclear programme.

But Russia's insistence on a time-limit for the measures would prevent that. The US, meanwhile, is pushing for even harsher sanctions that the European draft.

Both Russia and China, which supported the Russian amendments, have major commercial ties with Iran and Russia's ambassador to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin, indicated that Moscow's draft dropped all reference to a \$51 billion contract to build Iran's first nuclear power station.

Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, returning from a visit to the

European Union headquarters in Brussels, said Russia would support sanctions "on condition that the measures have a clear time limit" and that the document contained "a mechanism for ending these measures," Interfax reported.

"We are prepared to accept measures against Iran, so attempts to accuse us of refusing to accept the resolution are absolutely baseless," he was quoted as saying by ITAR-Tass.

Lavrov called on all sides to be "pragmatic."

"If we hold to the position of 'not abandoning our principles,' then the other side will have the same reaction," he warned, according to ITAR-Tass. "Any settlement needs to start with steps toward one another."

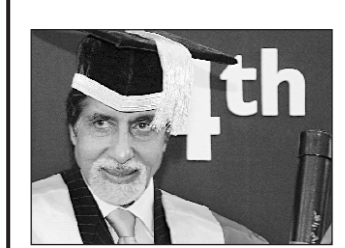
Meanwhile, Iran yesterday announced it had successfully test-fired new anti-armour weaponry and an anti-helicopter missile system on the third day of its latest war games.

"The new generation of anti-helicopter and anti-armour weapons were successfully tested on day three of the manoeuvres," an announcer on state television said as pictures of the test-firing were broadcast.

In the "Great Prophet II" war games, Iran has so far fired its Shahab-3 longer range missile for the first time in manoeuvres as well as new types of land-to-sea and sea-to-sea missiles.



Thousands of Iranians demonstrate in Tehran to mark the 27th anniversary of the seizure of the US embassy by Islamist students yesterday. The demonstrators, mainly schoolchildren and students, brandished banners proclaiming "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" as they gathered outside the walls of the former embassy, now known locally as the "Den of Spies", warning Washington against taking action over Iran's nuclear programme.



Delhi university honours 'Big B'

PTI, New Delhi

Delhi University (DU) yesterday honoured Bollywood icon Amitabh Bachchan, Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, cartoonist R K Laxman and prominent scientist C N R Rao with honorary degrees.

Amid thunderous applause, DU Vice Chancellor Deepak Pental conferred the 'honouris causa' degree to Bachchan, Dikshit, Laxman and Rao, the scientific advisor to prime minister, for their exemplary contribution in their respective fields.

Industrialist Ratan Tata, historian Romila Thapar and writer Mahashweta Devi, who were also chosen by the university for conferring the degree, could not make it to the function.

Musharraf likely to drop charges against Benazir

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Islamabad

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has agreed to drop all cases against former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and also share power with her, according to a close Bhutto family member.

Hakim Ali Zardari, whose son Asif Ali Zardari is married to Benazir, said he was in contact with the "government people" but maintained that his Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) will not share power with the army, according to a report in The News International on Saturday.

Addressing a news conference at Nawabshah in Sind, the Zardari senior said he was opposed to what he called the "mullah-military alliance" that was working against the national interest.

The family elder described the news of differences between his son Asif Zardari and daughter-in-law Benazir as "a mere rumour floated by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)," Pakistan military's powerful intelligence agency.

The two were married in July 1987 and have three children. Asif has been in and out of jail fighting various corruption charges.

In a reference to the rebellion in Balochistan and Sindh, Zardari senior was critical of the Musharraf regime saying that the government had created a situation that resembles the one prevailing in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971.

That the government and Benazir have been "in contact" has been a subject of much speculation and even political analysis for long. Analysts in Pakistan and in western countries have surmised that an alliance with PPP would give the Musharraf-supported Pakistan Muslim League (Qaid) the much-needed political legitimacy.

Moreover, such an alliance would be preferred even by the US, which wants to promote 'secular' forces in Pakistan to hold the Islamist forces at bay that have gained ascendancy in the region particularly after 9/11 and the overthrow of the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Top cheerleaders of Iraq war abandon Bush

AFP, Washington

And now they have had a change of heart. Only three days before a crucial congressional election in which Republicans are poised to suffer heavy losses, top US neoconservatives, who had cheered the US invasion of Iraq, admitted that the operation may not have been that necessary, after all.

In separate interviews with Vanity Fair magazine, former top Pentagon adviser Richard Perle, White House speechwriter David Frum and Reagan administration arms control negotiator

Kenneth Adelman continued to insist that toppling the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein was a noble thing to have done.

But they argued that the execution of the plan by President George W. Bush, Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others, was nothing short of "incompetent".

Perle, who once chaired the Pentagon's Defence Policy Board and in that capacity argued that Iraq was "a very good candidate" for democracy, said bluntly that if he could turn back the clock, he would not recommend invading Iraq now.

Israel keeps up deadly Gaza offensive

7 more Palestinians killed

AFP, Beit Hanun

Israel continued its campaign of deadly air strikes in the Gaza Strip as seven more Palestinians were killed yesterday taking the death toll to 42 since its latest operation began four days ago.

Three people were killed in a helicopter raid in Jabalya that wounded five others, including a child who was in critical condition, they said.

The dead included two brothers,

Eissa and Ali al-Nauk, 26 and 25, medics said. It was not immediately clear whether or not they were militants.

Sixteen-year-old Mohammed Baaluja was also killed in the raid.

Earlier, Luaye al-Burnu, a local commander for the armed wing of the ruling Hamas movement, was killed in an air raid in Gaza City that wounded four other militants.

Two others were killed in the northern town of Beit Hanun, which has borne the brunt of the Israeli operation since it began on

Wednesday morning, aimed at stopping militants from firing rockets into Israeli territory.

Marwan Abu Harbid, 46, was killed by tank fire on his house while a Hamas militant, Ibrahim al-Bassuni, 18, was killed by special forces fire.

And in Jabalya, five members of Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's armed wing, were wounded by artillery fire. One of them, Raed Siam, 30, then died of his wounds in hospital.