

# Iraqi Gen, troops join Shi'ite forces

Reports from Damascus say that an Iraqi General and his troops have defected to the Shi'ite rebel forces in southern Iraq and have cut off a main road leading to the port of Basra, according to AIR monitored in Dhaka.

A statement by the exiled Shi'ites claimed that the rebels have gained control of two towns near Basra.

Reuters from Baghdad adds: Talks on Kurdish autonomy were going well and should result in a final agreement next week, the pro-government Kurdish newspaper Al-Iraq reported Saturday.

The dialogue between the (Iraqi) political leadership and a team representing Kurdish parties has reached a new phase on the road of achieving a final agreement strengthening national unity and consolidating the self-rule experiment, the paper said.

It quoted sources close to the negotiations as saying: "In the light of optimism prevailing over the dialogue, a final agreement is expected within

the coming week".

A Kurdish rebel leader told Reuters on Wednesday it could take up to two weeks to reach an agreement with Baghdad on Kurdish autonomy.

Massoud Barzani, the head of a Kurdish delegation representing eight guerrilla groups negotiating with the central government, said they had made most progress on the guidelines for democracy in Iraq.

The new agreement now being drawn up will ensure a stronger position in facing hostile designs," Al-Iraq said.

The Kurdish team has been in Baghdad for more than two weeks. The talks followed abortive uprisings by Kurds in the north and Shi'ite Muslims in the south after the Gulf war.

A first round of talks last month led to an agreement in principle to revive a 1970 accord which recognised the Kurds as a distinct nation and gave them extensive rights to run their own affairs.

# 100 LTTE activists arrested in Tamil Nadu

## Video film on sequences of Rajiv's assassination seized

Police in the southern Indian city of Madras say they have obtained a video film which could be crucial evidence in the hunt for the killers of Rajiv Gandhi. The film is said to show the full sequence of events leading to the explosion which killed Gandhi. The woman still regarded as the key suspect who had been seen walking her way to garland Gandhi with flowers, according to BHC monitored in Dhaka.

The authorities have stepped up securities in Madras airport and are reported to be questioning Sri Lankan leaving India.

In Tamil Nadu, 100 LTTE activists have been rounded up following the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Disclosing this, the state Chief Secretary said in Madras that all the coastal areas in the southern districts of the state and the refugee camps are being kept under strict vigil and surveillance.

He said, that over 3600 anti-social elements have also been rounded up all over the state during the last three days.

AFP from New Delhi adds: Investigating officials have collected more evidence pointing towards the involvement of Sri Lankan Tamil Militants in the murder of former Indian

Premier Rajiv Gandhi, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said Saturday.

Government officials in Delhi were quoted as saying the RDX explosives used in the bomb that killed Rajiv Gandhi Tuesday in the southern state of Tamil Nadu were the same as those used in the murder of Wjeratne in Colombo on March 2.

Two electrical switches were used to "arm" and "initiate" the bomb, which is estimated to have contained more than one kilogram (2.2 pounds) of explosives, PTI said.

Federal Home Minister of State Subodh Kant Sahay said Thursday a woman suicide bomber with explosives wired to her body was the key suspect, and the bomb was designed to explode when she leaned over.

Sahay said a wire, a spring and an imported battery had been found among the remains of the women's torso, adding that the upper portion of her body was completely blown off.

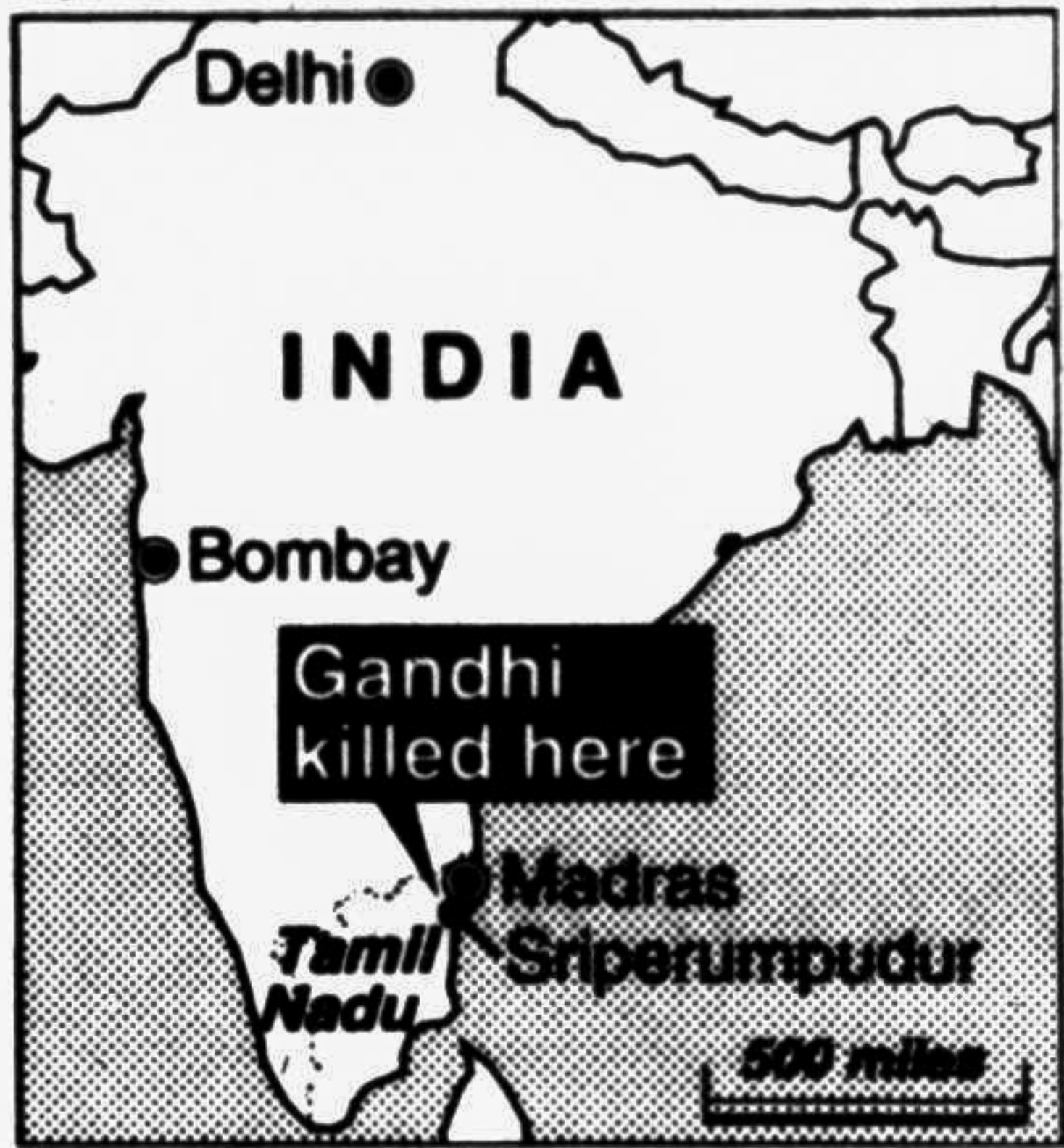
Another reports adds: Thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils are worried about their future in India following the shock assassination of former Premier Rajiv Gandhi by a woman suspected to be a Tamil militant.

Sri Lankans say the Tamils, almost all of them refugees are keeping their fingers crossed after leading Indian politicians called for their repatriation to protest Gandhi's killing.

The Indian government has not responded to the demands, and it is widely believed the calls would not be heeded, but relief workers say that has not eased the refugees fears.

There is a lot of apprehension (among refugees), said S. Chandrasahnan, a Sri Lankan Tamil in Madras, capital of the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu where the 46-year-old Gandhi was killed by a powerful bomb Tuesday.

The killing in Sriperumpudur town near Madras has been blamed on a young



NEW DELHI: Armed security officers guard the ashes of slain former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi May 25, one day after the body of the Congress (I) Party leader was cremated. —AFP photo.

## Video-tape shows a fourth woman

NEW DELHI, May 26: A videotape of the last moments of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi shows a "fourth woman" handing him a bouquet seconds before the explosion that killed him, a newspaper here said on Sunday, reports AFP.

The Sunday Observer in a front page article said it had been privy to an exclusive screening of the video, which was confiscated by the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's CIA and FBI rolled into one.

Reports to date have focused suspicion on one of three women who garlanded the former premier just before

that could be seen on the tape of the "fourth woman" was her left shoulder and arm, in a dark half-sleeved blouse.

The tape then showed Gandhi turning with the "large round" bouquet held high with both hands towards the speaking dais where he was to address the crowd.

"Almost immediately there is a loud boom and the screen goes blindingly white," the newspaper said, adding that the evidence on the tape opens various possibilities including there being more than one bomb.

Reports leaked from investigators have said the explosive used was a plastic explosive often used in military operations, and of the same type that killed a prominent Sri Lankan politician in March.

## Rajiv was like a son to me, says priest

NEW DELHI, May 26: When news broke that Rajiv Gandhi had been assassinated, the family of the former Indian Prime Minister summoned one man to help to lay his soul to rest — Hindu priest Ganpat Ram Acharya, reports Reuters.

The 70-year-old Brahmin, who has cremated three generations of the Nehru-Gandhi political dynasty, immediately began organising the funeral rites according to ancient Hindu tradition.

"I was shocked when I first heard he had been killed," Ganpat said in an interview on Sunday as he stood on the sprawling grounds of Teen Murti House, where Gandhi grew up, watching over the copper urns containing the ashes of the late leader.

"I did not believe it could happen. Soon after, I was called by the family to prepare for the funeral," said Ganpat, an expert in Hindu and Vedic religious rituals who has become the priest of the Nehru-Gandhi family.

The grandfather of three, who studied Hindu and Vedic philosophy and religious rites in the holy city of Varanasi, was perhaps better versed than any other person in the cremation rituals used for Gandhi on Friday.

Ganpat cremated Rajiv Gandhi's grandfather Jawharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, who died in 1964.

In 1984, Ganpat was again summoned, this time to oversee the cremation of Gandhi's mother, Indira, who was shot dead by her Sikh bodyguards.

All the cremations took place in New Delhi by the banks of the Jamuna river.

Ganpat had presided over the cremation of Rajiv Gandhi's brother, Sanjay, who was killed in an air crash in 1980.

With the death of Rajiv Gandhi, 46, who was killed by an unidentified woman suicide bomber on Tuesday, history has repeated itself with a cruel twist for the Gandhi family and for Ganpat.

"I felt his (Gandhi's) loss deeply. He was like a son to me. I had watched him

grow up," the priest said.

Ganpat's father was a religious scholar and close friend of Nehru and of India's revered independence leader Mahatma Gandhi, no relation of Rajiv Gandhi.

"The whole family has suffered much. The family has sacrificed their lives in the name of the nation," said Ganpat, who guided Gandhi's son Rahul as he circled and lit his father's funeral pyre.

Ganpat, with long white hair, flowing white beard and a vermilion 'tikka' dot on his forehead, said Gandhi's ashes would be scattered in several rivers across India.

Several of the urns containing Gandhi's ashes will be taken by train to Allahabad, 550 km (340 miles) east of Delhi, to be immersed on Tuesday at the "Sangam", where the holy waters of the Ganges river meet the Jamuna and the Mythical Saraswati river.

"The Sangam forms the holiest place. When the ashes mix with the waters of the three rivers, the soul of Rajiv Gandhi will be settled," Ganpat said.



NEW DELHI— Ganpat Ram Acharya, seen directing cremation of Rajiv Gandhi. Sonia and Priyanka are also seen.

## Thousands of Burmese flee Thai town

MAE SOT (Thailand), May 26: Thousands of Burmese have fled the frontier town of Mae Sot after Thai army officers threatened to turn them over to Rangoon authorities.

More than 2,500 had already left the prosperous trading centre on the Thai-Burma border, a Thai officer told Reuters on Saturday.

Most were heading for their home villages across the border near Myawadi but 700 were seeking shelter at a nearby refugee camp run by the Karen Ethnic minority.

The Thai army said last week it planned to send more than 20,000 Burmese illegal immigrants back across the border by the end of May.

The Military Junta in Rangoon has been seeking the return of dissidents who fled the suppression of a student-led pro-democracy uprising in 1988.

Thai officers say most of the illegal immigrants are in Thailand to find work.

## Off the Record

### Rousing cheers for William Kennedy

WASHINGTON: William Kennedy Smith received his medical school diploma Saturday to the rousing cheers of those attending graduation ceremonies in the hall named for his late uncle John F. Kennedy, reports AP.

Smith, dressed in cap and gown, smiled as he walked across the stage at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall amid sustained applause and cheering from the audience and other graduates of the Georgetown University School of Medicine.

The 30-year-old medical student has been the focus of nationwide attention since a woman accused him of raping her at the Kennedy family estate in Palm Beach, Florida, on March 30.

Smith, who has denied the allegations, has been charged with second-degree sexual battery and misdemeanor battery. He is free on 10,000 dollars bond.

Smith did not join the other 207 graduates in the entry procession, avoiding photographers and reporters by slipping into the hall by a side entrance.

And while his classmates received their diplomas in alphabetical order, Smith was moved up among the first half of the mounting the stage and did not return to his seat with the other students.

The commencement speech was given by Dr. Robert G. Petersdorf, president of the association of American Medical Colleges, who warned the new doctors that "integrity does not come easy" and urged them to "avoid greed at all costs."

Smith is to become a resident at the Bernalillo County Medical Center at the University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque.

### MENOPOZ!

SEATTLE: A motorist who wants to end the stigma associated with menopause almost didn't get to keep her personalized license plates that read "MENOPOZ," until a licensing official going through the same rite of passage intervened, reports AP.

"There's nothing offensive or indecent about menopause," said the motorist, 50-year-old Dorothy Mitchell. "Even if it's on my license plates."

She was told there had been a complaint and her plates were being cancelled.

"It has come to our attention that the phrase used on your personalized plate, MENOPOZ, is offensive to good taste and decency," said a letter from Bob Anderson, assistant director of vehicle services in the state department of Licensing.

Under state law, the department can refuse to issue or withdraw such plates, said Anderson, who also sent Mitchell new license plates.

On Friday, however, the state had a change of heart.

"It's time for menopause to come out of the closet," Licensing Director Mary Faulk told Mitchell. "I'm 48 and I'm going through it also."

Faulk said she reversed the decision "because I don't think a normal process of aging to be in bad taste."

Mitchell, who works in customer service at a United Parcel Service office, said she got the idea for the MENOPOZ late after she bought a "dumb, sporty new car" six months ago.

"I bought the car on impulse, and when I told my dad, he wanted to know why I did that because I always have been very conservative," she said. "I told him that it must have been my menopause phase — and then I thought, I'll put that on my license plate."



MALACCA (Malaysia): Scorpion trainer Nayan Zaki (30) allows scorpions to crawl over his face during his show at the Malacca Butterfly Park May 25. The scorpions still have their lethal poison and two bites of the insect can kill Zaki instantly. —AFP photo.

## BRIEFLY

**75,000 killed in Salvador:** Representatives of El Salvador's government and leftist guerrillas on Saturday opened a decisive round of peace talks to end the 11-year civil war that has killed more than 75,000 people, Reuters reports from Caracas.

Government negotiators and commanders of the rebel Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) arrived in Caracas on Friday and met Venezuelan Presidential Secretary Minister Beatrice Rangel behind closed doors on Saturday.

After the meeting at the Presidential palace the delegates from the war-torn Central American Nation declined to speak to reporters, on the prospects for the talks, organised under the auspices of the United Nations.

**Angolan foes to remove mines:** With a provisional ceasefire between the Angolan army and UNITA rebels reported to be holding for a 10th day Saturday, the two forces are to begin removing land mines on roads near the central town of Waku Kungo, AP reports from Luanda.

Senior officers from both sides said Saturday they reached agreement at a meeting held late Friday as part of efforts by a joint military commission set up Tuesday to monitor the truce.

They belong to one of the sub-commissions established by Tuesday's agreement. Their body is responsible for central Angola.

Deactivation of the mines is aimed at ensuring security for road traffic, mainly conveys taking food supplies to Waku Kung in Cuanza Sul province, some 350 kilometers (218 miles) southeast of Luanda, the officers said.

**9 Soviet republics sign accord:** Russian leader Boris Yeltsin said Saturday nine of the 15 Soviet republics were in nearly complete agreement on signing a treaty to preserve the nation and rename it the Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics, AP reports from Moscow.

At a news conference marking the end of a five-day session of the Russian Congress of People's Deputies, Yeltsin said that the consensus-building in the Soviet Union would allow the individual republics to play a greater role in the world economy.

The agreement to rename the country came at an eight-hour meeting Friday attended by President Mikhail S Gorbachev and the heads of eight of the nine republics, including Yeltsin, the Russian leader said.

He said all the republics agreed to retain the initials "USSR", but change the name "Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" to "Union of Soviet Sovereign Republics."

**Cholera kills 12 in Colombia:** A cholera epidemic sweeping south America has killed 12 people in Colombia and 897 others are being treated in hospital, Colombia's National Health Institute said on Saturday, reports Reuters from Bogota.

The epidemic broke out in Peru earlier this year and spread to Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil and Chile, killing more than 1,000 people, doctors blame the rapid spread of the disease on lack of sewage systems and clean drinking water.

A world bank study has said it would cost 50 billion dollars to install adequate sanitation throughout Latin America.

**904 drug dealers arrested:** Panamanian authorities aided by US officials have arrested at least 904 drug dealers and seized 5,313 kilos (11,700 pounds) of cocaine in the first five months of this year in a multi-front offensive against Colombian drug cartels, according to a US report obtained Saturday by AFP from Panama City.

But the confidential US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) document said that, in spite of these successes, US officials were concerned about an increasing presence here of the Cali Cartel, money laundering, Colombian Drug Transshipment and Drug Consumption in Panama.

**Perez for Ethiopian ceasefire:** UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar on Saturday appealed to warring Ethiopians to call an immediate ceasefire, Reuters reports from United Nations.

The Secretary General has been following with growing concern the unfolding events in Ethiopia said a UN statement.

He appeals to all sides to observe an immediate ceasefire. In order to enhance the chances of success of a negotiated settlement it said.

The statement called on all parties in Ethiopia to cooperate with UN humanitarian assistance programmes which the statement said will be intensified with a view to meeting the needs of the people of Ethiopia.

**Bid to end S African violence:** Government, church and business leaders have launched a fresh attempt to end black township violence, the main obstacle to power-sharing talks leading to a post-apartheid South Africa, reports Reuters.

A two-day peace summit in Pretoria, boycotted by the African National Congress (ANC) and its allies, decided on Saturday to set up two committees to help organise talks acceptable to all parties.

The ANC, the main black organisation fighting apartheid, shunned the meeting because it was convened by the government, but says it is willing to attend a conference organised by an impartial group.

About 1,800 people have been killed in the past nine months in battles in the black townships, largely between supporters of the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party led by Zulu chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi.