

Pindi to introduce death penalty for drug trafficking

ISLAMABAD, Jan 7: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said on Wednesday he would soon introduce a law in Parliament to impose death penalty on drug traffickers, reports Reuters.

"As in some other countries, we also want death penalty for drug traffickers," state television reported Sharif as telling a crowd of people at the Punjab town of Sheikhupura.

"A draft law will soon be presented before the national assembly," he added.

The current maximum sentence for drug trafficking is 25 years in prison.

Pakistan is a major source of heroin smuggled to western countries and itself has a large number of drug addicts.

Politicians demand judicial inquiry : Death toll rises to 50

Kashmiris defy curfew in Sopore

SOPORE, India, Jan 7: More than a 1,000 people defied curfew in this still smoldering city Thursday to protest the deaths of more than 50 people by fire and bullets after a clash between Muslim militants and Indian security forces, reports AP.

Residents and witnesses said the troops shot indiscriminately at civilians and set fire to Sopore's fruit market Wednesday after two soldiers were killed in a land mine explosion.

The government, however, said an ammunition dump was hit by gunfire during a clash with the separatist guerrillas police chief Balwinder Singh Bedi admitted many people were killed by the security forces. "This is most unfortu-

nate," Bedi said.

An official statement Wednesday said 42 people were killed. Residents said they pulled seven charred bodies from the ashes of the market on Thursday, and that 20 to 25 more bodies may be found when the flames die out.

About 1,000 people stormed into the streets and shouted anti-India slogans at the market place as riot police stood by, allowing the curfew to go unenforced.

"I saw soldiers throwing kerosene at a bus and a car," said Ghulam Rasoon Gar, a businessman whose grocery store was gutted.

Kashmiri politicians demanded a judicial inquiry into what they described in a statement as "widespread

vandalism unleashed by security forces."

Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao ordered team headed by a federal government minister to fly to Sopore to probe the incident.

Jan Mohammed Parey, who runs a clinical laboratory, said he heard a blast, followed by a gunshot. He then saw soldiers firing indiscriminately at people.

Parey said he saw three soldiers in front of his clinic open fire at some civilians on the street when he fled through a back door.

Lt. Gen. Ahmed Zaki, advisor to Governor Girish Saxena, refused to comment to reporters after he visited the town, about 55 kilometers (35 miles) north of Srinagar, the

capital of Jammu-Kashmir state. Residents said he did not question any of the townspeople about the incident.

The government said more than 250 shops and 50 houses, two buses and three cars were destroyed in the blasts. Much of it was still smoldering when reporters were allowed into the city on Thursday.

AFP adds: Saifuddin Soz, a former MP, said members of the Federal Border Security Force (BSF) went on a killing spree in the town of Sopore on Wednesday after two of their men were shot and injured by militants.

"It was a free for all from the (security) forces," said Soz, a Muslim who represented Sopore in the Indian parliament for about 10 years,

attributing his information to "local people" who reached him by telephone.

Newspapers said more than 50 people were killed in the devastating fire which broke out following one of the fiercest gun battles yet between the security forces and Kashmiri Muslim separatists.

Officials said in Sri Nagar Wednesday that 42 bodies, mostly of men, had been recovered. Some bore bullet wounds.

The officials said the blaze broke out after a house where militants had stored explosives caught fire. They said the blaze quickly spread to nearby areas, engulfing more than 400 houses and shops.

But Soz blamed the BSF for the fire, and added that he was

going to ask the federal home ministry to order a judicial investigation into the events.

The soldiers went on a killing spree after the militants attacked their men and snatched a machine gun." He quoted his informants as telling him.

The fire, he said, covered radius of almost one kilometer (mile) from the main market of Sopore, an apple-growing region in Kashmir's north and known stronghold of Muslim separatists.

Meanwhile, BSF Director General T Anantachri left for Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital, today to investigate the alleged involvement of his paramilitary force in the Sopore carnage, officials said.

Somali warlords' meet in April

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia, Jan 7: Somali warlords have tentatively agreed to hold a national reconciliation meeting in April, and will continue UN organized talks Thursday on calling a truce, sources say, reports AP.

But after three days of often-acrimonious talks, the leaders had not been able to agree Wednesday on who would prepare the April meeting, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

UN chief Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who left Addis Ababa on Wednesday, has warned the bickering Somali factions that the international force feeding their starving nation could give up and leave if they fail to make peace soon.

The sources said they would meet again Thursday to debate implementing a truce and naming the committee to plan the reconciliation conference.

BRIFFLY

German plane crashes: A small German passenger plane crashed short of the runway near Paris's Charles de Gaulle airport in wet, foggy weather on Wednesday night and four passengers were killed police and airport officials said, Reuters reports from Paris.

The other 15 passengers were all injured, eight of them seriously, while the four crew members on board Lufthansa flight 5634 from Bremen escaped unharmed.

Airport sources said the twin-propeller de Havilland Dash-8 plane landed on or near a road just outside the airport perimeter and came to a halt in a remote area at the beginning of runway 28 at around 7.20 pm (1820 GMT).

China to set up customs bureau: China is to set up its first customs investigation bureau in a move to curb growing smuggling activities, a report here said Thursday, reports AFP from Hong Kong.

With an initial staff of 700, the bureau will be set up next week in Shenzhen, which borders Hong Kong, the semi-official Hong Kong China Service said.

The agency, quoting Chinese customs officials, said the bureau, was needed because smuggling was increasing along with the country's expanding trade.

Last year, customs officials in Shenzhen uncovered more than 5,000 smuggling cases an increase of more than 30 per cent over 1991, with a total value of 250 million yuan (43 million U S dollars).

Iranian jailed in Malaysia: A Malaysian court has sentenced an Iranian butcher to five years in jail and 10 strokes of the cane for possessing 280 grams (9.9 ounces) of raw opium, newspapers reported yesterday, says Reuters from Kuala Lumpur.

A lower court in the western town of Shah Alam passed the sentence of Abbas Mohammad Zadeh Bajand, 30, of Tehran after he pleaded guilty to possessing the drugs at the Kuala Lumpur international airport last April.

Malaysia has handed more than 100 people under its anti-drug laws, which prescribe the death penalty for possessing more than 15 grams (0.53 ounce) of heroin and 200 grams (7.05 ounces) of cannabis.

Palestinian shot dead: Israeli troops shot dead a Palestinian youth and a Palestinian boy lost an eye on Wednesday during separate clashes in the occupied territories, the army, witnesses or hospital sources said, reports Reuters from Jerusalem.

In another incident, two children of one of the 415 Palestinians deported by Israel for links with Islamic groups in the territories were hospitalized after inhaling teargas, they added.

An army spokeswoman said one Palestinian was shot dead by soldiers while throwing stones in the area of Hebron in the occupied West bank. Palestinians named his as Ziad Ahmed el-Matour, 17, from the village of Safr.

Hospital workers said 19 others Palestinians were hurt in the clashes in the Gaza strip and West bank.

2 royal members property seized: The Kuwaiti authorities have seized property from two members of the Emir's royal family, and another person, suspected in a scandal involving Kuwaiti investment losses in Spain, a Kuwaiti newspaper said Wednesday, reports AFP from Kuwait City.

The prosecutor had ordered property seized from those suspected in the scandal at the Kuwait Investment Office (KIO) in Spain, the Al-Qabas paper said.

Property was seized from Sheikh Fahd Mohammad Al-Sabah, former Director of the KIO office in London, his assistant Sheikh Khaled Nasser Al-H'mou Al-Sabah and former executive of the Kuwaiti holding company, Fouad Jaafar, as well as from close relatives, Al-Qabas said.

Phnom Penh celebrates liberation: The Phnom Penh government today celebrated 14 years of liberation from the radical Khmer Rouge, with ceremonies that touted the government's achievements and railed against the Khmer Rouge, reports AFP from Phnom Penh.

The Cambodian People's Party has saved the Cambodian people, allowing them to escape from the prisons without walls of the disastrous Pol Pot regime, and has allowed the Cambodian people to live comfortably in an independent, sovereign, democratic nation," Honorary party Chairman Heng Samrin said.

"No other party except the Cambodian People's Party dared to stand up for the reconciliation and solidarity of the Cambodian people to topple the disastrous regime," he told 700 civil servants assembled inside the capital's stuffy Tonle bazaar theater.

Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia in 1978 and installed the Phnom Penh government under leaders Pen Sovan and Heng Samrin on January 7, 1979, ending the fuel of the Khmer Rouge, which was blamed for the deaths of some one million Cambodians.



WASHINGTON: US President George Bush (R) meets with bi-partisan leaders Sen. Robert Dole, R-Kan (L), Sen. George Mitchell, D-Maine (2nd-L), Vice President Dan Quayle (2nd-R), at the White House oval office on Wednesday. The President briefed the senators on his recent overseas trip to Somalia and discussed the situation on the Iraqi no-fly zone. — AFP/UNB photo.

1000 killed in fresh Angolan battles

LUANDA, Jan 7: More than 1,000 people have been killed in battles between UNITA rebels and government forces around the Angolan coastal city of Benguela, state radio reported today, says Reuters.

The radio monitored by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) quoted a UNITA spokesman as describing the situation as catastrophic. Fierce fighting was reported in three provinces around the city of Humbo, UNITA's main headquarters.

Diplomats said on Wednesday that the ruling MPLA (Popular movement for the Liberation of Angola) was trying to crush UNITA in major cities.

There is quite clearly a

concerted attempt by the government to do away now with UNITA, a western diplomat said. State radio accused UNITA rebels of killing unarmed people in Benguela.

"There are many dead on the streets. UNITA is murdering people particularly unarmed youths, whenever it is forced to withdraw, it said.

The Governor of Benguela province, Paulo Jorge, said on national radio late on Wednesday that government forces still held the cities of Benguela and Lobito where house-to-house fighting was taking place.

State radio said on Wednesday that UNITA forces had been expelled from most of Cunene province, although

there was still fighting around the town of Namacunde. Fighting had died a won in the Atlantic City of Namibe but a dusk to dawn curfew had been imposed.

There was no independent verification of radio reports that UNITA forces had been crushed in Namibe and that prisoners were taken.

In the same reports, state radio said UNITA artillery gunners were pounding Cuito, capital of Bie province in the central highlands, and in N'diva, in Cunene province near the border with Namibia.

The state-run news agency ANGOP said government forces had recaptured the northwestern towns of Caxito and Ndalatando from UNITA after a

week-long offensive. UNITA, which seized the towns in November, denied the report.

UNITA Information Secretary Jorge Valentim accused government forces of indiscriminately attacking civilians and said UNITA was resisting in its stronghold Lobito. The government had sent for reinforcements.

This is really war, Valentim told Reuters by telephone from Huambo. We are obliged to respond if we are not all to die.

Prime Minister Marcelino Moco said the former Portuguese colony was in a situation of undeclared war but the government still wanted to salvage its 1991 peace agreement with UNITA, which ended 16 years of civil war.

Minister denies secret talks with LTTE

COLOMBO, Jan 7: A key Sri Lankan Minister Thursday denied holding secret peace talks with Tamil Tiger guerrillas amid reports that they had agreed to halt attacks in the capitals, reports AFP.

Justice Minister A C S Hameed in a statement rejected as "incorrect and baseless" a report in the privately run island daily that Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) had talks with him in London and Paris.

Hameed who returned to the island earlier in the week after a two-week visit to Europe issued a brief statement saying he had no talks with the LTTE either in London or Paris.

The island quoted unnamed sources as saying that the LTTE's Paris-based spokesman Lawrence Thilkar had given an assurance that they will not carry out guerrilla attacks

Off the Record

Another commoner for Japanese throne

TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa on Thursday indirectly confirmed news reports that Crown Prince Naruhito had picked diplomat Masako Owada as his bride, and called it "extremely good news," reports AFP.

Asked to comment on the reports Wednesday, he told reporters, "It is extremely good news. I am very pleased," and added that he would comment officially after the imperial household council, where official approval will be given.

Miyazawa did not state the date of the council, but acknowledged that it could be held on January 19, as reported earlier. He will chair the meeting.

Meanwhile, news reports said the wedding could be held as early as late May.

The 29-year-old Owada, the daughter of Vice Foreign Minister Hissashi Owada, will be the second commoner to become crown princess, following Empress Michiko.

Crown Prince Naruhito's younger brother, Prince Akishino, also married a commoner, Kiko Kawashima, the daughter of a university Professor, in June 1990.



I proudly cast my vote for Bush

LOS ANGELES: Former President Ronald Reagan on Wednesday angrily denied a UN magazine report that he voted for Democrat Bill Clinton in the US presidential election on November 3, dismissing it as "nonsense," reports Reuters.

"After more than 80 years on this earth and several decades in public life, I thought I'd heard everything. But this week's TV guide (magazine) story ranks up there with the worst of them," Reagan said in a statement released by his office.

"To put an end to such nonsense, I'll spell it out for you once and for all. I actively campaigned and energetically supported George Bush in the November election and I proudly cast my vote for him," he said.

Ballet star dead

PARIS: Russian-born ballet star Rudolf Nureyev died here Wednesday at the age of 54, said his doctor, Michael Canest, reports AFP.

Canest said Nureyev had died of "cardiac complications following a cruel illness."

It had been general knowledge for some time in the ballet community that Nureyev was suffering from the killer Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

He had been wheelchair-bound in his last few public appearances.

"The time and place of funeral ceremonies, as well as all other details, will be announced at a later time," Canest said in a communique.

The former star of the Bolshoi ballet had defected to the West at Paris le Bourget airport in 1961, and had formed a legendary partnership with the late Dame Margot Fonteyn, who died in 1991 at the age of 72.

He became a naturalised Austrian in 1982.



FILES: This May 5 '88 file photo shows Russian born ballet dancer Rudolf Nureyev with an unidentified partner during a performance. — AFP/UNB photo

Perotmen start membership drive next week

WASHINGTON, Jan 7: United We Stand, Ross Perot's citizens lobby group, disclosed plans on Wednesday to kick off a nationwide membership drive beginning next week, reports Reuters.

"Mr Perot will be announcing all the plans, goals and objectives of the group, and how we're going to organize," spokeswoman Sharon Holman said.

"He plans to be highly visible and very active," she said in a telephone interview from the group's Dallas headquarters.

Perot will launch the membership effort at a news conference in Dallas.

Serb forces rape women to intimidate Muslims

LONDON, Jan 7: Serb forces are raping women in Bosnia-Herzegovina as a weapon of war to intimidate Muslim communities and carry out "ethnic cleansing," The head of a team of European Community investigators said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Dame Anne Warburton said her group had come across such a high incidence of reported rape that they concluded it was part of a considered strategy to strike fear into Muslim communities and drive them from their homes.

"We did think that the incidence of rape was far in excess of what is expected when a conflict spreads out and that what was happening was a stage in the conflict aimed at getting the population to move,"

Warburton, a former diplomat, told British television.

"We saw it as being part of the push to get the Muslim communities to move," she said in an interview with channel four news, referring to the practice known as "ethnic cleansing."

Warburton was not asked directly about a report in Wednesday's independent newspaper which said her EC delegation believed Serb forces in Bosnia had carried out the organised rape of at least 20,000 Muslim women and girls, some as young as six or seven years.

The independent, quoting from what it called a confidential interim report by the investigators, said daughters had been raped in front of their

parents, mothers in front of children, and wives in front of their husbands. Many gang rape victims suffered severe mental trauma as a result, it said.

The EC delegation visited Croatia late last year to interview alleged rape victims among refugees from Bosnia and their report is thought to have been sent to EC foreign ministers and the United Nations, which is looking into reported abuses and atrocities in the former Yugoslavia.

Another member of the delegation, Irish Foreign Minister David Andrews, said on Tuesday that a "horribly high" number of Muslim women appeared to have been raped in Bosnia some of them "in particularly sadistic ways

as to inflict maximum humiliation on victims."

"Rape has become an instrument and not a by-product of war," Andrews said at a news conference in Dublin.

Bosnian Serb leaders have said that reports of systematic rape by their forces are just propaganda to pave the way for possible international military intervention in the civil war.

Meanwhile: Dramatically raising previous estimates, the United States said on Wednesday as many as 70,000 people could be held prisoner in the former Yugoslavia, many in secret camps unknown to the international Red Cross.

"There are U S government estimates that there could be as many as 70,000 people who are held in camps in the

former Yugoslavia," said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

He had no breakdown on how many were held by each of the warring parties — the Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims. But the assumption is that he majority would be in Serb hands.

As recently as Tuesday, Boucher gave vastly different figures. He cited an international committee of the Red Cross report of December 31 which gave the numbers of prisoners officially registered with that organisation.

They were: 887 detainees held by the Bosnian government, 537 held by Croatia, and 1,333 held by Bosnian Serbs.

Boucher said then that both the United States and the Red

Cross believed the true figures for prisoners to be much higher but said he could give no estimates.

A day later, he said the United States had shared its estimate of up to 70,000 prisoners with Red Cross which was trying to locate and bring under its protection as many prisoners as it could.

The problem is really that they haven't been able to get access to all the possible places of detention. They continue to try," said Boucher.

At the Omaska Camp, survivors described seeing men beaten to death, shot in the back and burned alive. There were also reports of mass executions and torture in the Keraterm camp, Kotor Varos and many others.

Pretoria to free 8000 convicts

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 7: Citing overcrowded prisons, the government Wednesday announced plans for the early release of 8,000 convicts, reports AP.

The country already is suffering unprecedented levels of crime, attributable in part to a 4-year-old recession and the early release last year of more than 50,000 prisoners.

Correctional Services Minister Adrian Vlok said the first releases would be January 18. Those to be freed already have served most of their sentences, he said.

Murderers, rapists and others convicted of serious crimes would not be eligible for early release, Vlok added.