

26 killed as Egyptian cops clash with fundamentalists

CAIRO, Mar 11: Egyptian police killed 20 Muslim extremists in a Nile River Valley offensive that cost the lives of four policemen and a fundamentalist's wife and baby, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

At least 40 people were injured in the four police raids, the government's Middle East News Agency reported Wednesday. The agency attributed its account to an unidentified police official.

The bloodiest single incident occurred Tuesday night in the southern city of Aswan, where 14 extremists and a policeman were killed and at least 35 were injured in a gunfight with police surrounding a mosque to prevent a protest march.

China backs UN Commission to slam Myanmar unanimously

GENEVA, Mar 11: The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has slammed Myanmar for the "continued seriousness of the situation of human rights" there and extended for a future year the mandate of special rapporteur Yozo Yokota of Japan, reports AFP.

In a resolution adopted unanimously on Wednesday — thus with the approval of China — the commission called on the military junta in Yangon to allow the country to return to democratic rule and to release opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, detained without trial for the past four years, as well as other detained political leaders and all political prisoners.

over.

The commission extended Yokota's mandate while deploring that "he has been denied access to some persons, in particular detainees including Aung San Suu Kyi and that a number of persons wishing to provide testimony have been subjected to intimidation or harassment."

It urged the junta to take "firm steps toward the establishment of a democratic state" to "allow all citizens to participate freely in the political process" and "to accelerate the process of transition to democracy in particular through convening of the parliament elected in May 1990."

The elections were won

overwhelmingly by the National League for Democracy but the junta, the State Law and Order Restoration Council refused to hand over power.

The commission expressed "deep concern at the violations of human rights in Myanmar which remain extremely serious, in particular concerning the practice of torture, summary and arbitrary execution, forced labour, including forced portering for the military, abuse of women, politically motivated arrests and detention."

It said the situation had "resulted in flows of refugees towards neighbouring countries" notably by Muslims who have fled to Bangladesh.

Japanese representative Shunji Maruyama said "Japan earnestly hopes that the Myanmar government will take concrete steps to improve the situation and to respond to the resolution."

But a member of the Myanmar delegation hinted that the next time, the UN rapporteur would not be allowed into the country.

"We are deeply disappointed by the report of the special rapporteur... There will be no recurrence of such experience."

He said "the allegations are unfounded and politically motivated," adding: "Every step has been taken to elaborate a new constitution based on democracy."

SRK rejects compromise with Croatia

BELGRADE, Mar 11: The self-proclaimed Serbian Republic of Krajina (SRK), located in southern Croatia, on Wednesday rejected a compromise drafted by an international mediator to end a weeks-old conflict between SRK and Croatian forces, the Tanjug news agency reported, says AFP from Belgrade.

Gerard Ahrens, an assistant to Yugoslav mediators Cyrus Vance and Lord Owen, met here earlier in the day with SRK officials, notably its "Foreign Minister", Slobodan Jarcevic.

Jarcevic told Tanjug the proposal called for United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) to take control of parts of Krajina seized by Croatian troops in its offensive that began January 22.

"No authority, even that of UNPROFOR, will be permitted on the territory of the SRK," Jarcevic stressed. "On that point no compromise is possible."

Misa Milosevic, the head of the World Serbian Community who also took part in Wednesday's talks, said the SRK is demanding that Croatia "strictly" adhere to UN Security Council Resolution 802.

The measures would require Croatia to pull its force back to positions held before the January 22 offensive.

Parkinson dead

LONDON, Mar 11: Cyril Northcote Parkinson, the creator of "Parkinson's Law" stating that work expands to fill the time available, has died at the age of 83, reports Reuters.

Parkinson, a British academic whose witty reflections on human nature made him a best-selling author in many countries, died in a clinic near his home in Canterbury, Southern England, on Tuesday, his family said.

Off the Record

Shyness is disadvantage for women

WASHINGTON: A male infected with AIDS is three times more likely to be correctly diagnosed in a Bronx emergency room than is an infected woman because doctors often are too shy to ask about sex, a study shows, reports AP.

Mayris P. Webber, a researcher with the Montefiore Medical Center and Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, said a study of more than 2,000 patients at a Bronx hospital shows that health workers were quicker to ask patients about drug habits than about unsafe sex. The Bronx is one of New York City's five boroughs.

As a result, she reports in a study to be published Thursday in the American Journal of Public Health, women infected with the AIDS virus from sexual intercourse often go undiagnosed until later in their disease.

Webber said an AIDS blood test often is conducted only if an emergency room doctor detects a condition associated with AIDS or learns that a patient is practicing some type of risky behavior, such as intra-IV drug use.

"When they ask about risky behaviour, 92.5 per cent of the time they asked only about IV (intravenous) drug use. I think it is easier to ask a person about an IV drug history than it is about sexual histories," said Webber. But she noted "That shyness or discomfort is a disadvantage for women patients."

American women, said Webber, are almost as likely to acquire AIDS from sexual intercourse as from IV drug use. As a result, women are more adversely affected by the not being asked about sex habits.

It must be open

WASHINGTON: A federal judge ruled on Wednesday that First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's task force on health care reform must hold open meetings to gather information, reports Reuters.

In a partial setback for the administration, US district judge Royce Lamberth barred the task force from holding any meeting until it complies with a 1972 law that requires Federal Advisory Committees to conduct sessions in the open.

Hillary Clinton and six cabinet members who belong to the task force were sued last month by two health groups and a public policy organisation seeking a court order that all task force meetings be conducted in the open.

"The public has the right to know what information is being presented to the task force and by whom it is being given, to learn of the costs involved in the gathering of the facts, and to attend these meetings," Lamberth wrote in the 30-page ruling.

"While the court takes no pleasure in determining that one of the first actions taken by a new president is in direct violation of a statute enacted by Congress, the court's duty is to apply the laws to all individuals," he said.

Access to disabled customers

WASHINGTON: The government has 10 lawyers to enforce the new statutory guarantee that disabled Americans can go shopping, attend a concert, or dine out. Already they have 80 to 90 cases apiece—and have filed exactly one lawsuit, reports AP.

In the year since the Americans with Disabilities Act required 5 million public places to provide access to disabled customers, the Justice Department unit has received 900 complaints of discrimination, most involving physical barriers.

Many stand to be resolved without legal action, once business fulfill their pledges to perform the needed work, such as building wheelchair ramps, officials say.

Meanwhile, the only court action so far was a suit filed in December against a California company charged with discriminating against hearing-impaired students enrolled in classes for certified public accountants. That case is pending.

"With a new law, it always takes some time to staff up," said John Wodatch, chief of the department's public access section, which includes the 10 attorney-investigators and three paralegal assistants. "I'm hopeful, as time goes by, to get more resources," he said.

Wodatch, whose unit is part of the Civil Rights Division, said all 10 lawyers are based in Washington, although cases under the act involve business nationwide and may require on-site inspections.

Christopher accuses UN of gross inefficiency

WASHINGTON, Mar 11: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher on Wednesday accused the United Nations of gross inefficiency, though he admitted a slight improvement under Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, reports Reuters.

Testifying to a house appropriations sub-committee, Christopher was asked whether he was satisfied with the UN's performance.

"No, sir, I'm not satisfied that it's been reformed. I think there are still inefficiencies, perhaps even gross inefficiencies," he said. "I'm by no means satisfied, although I do think that there has been some modest improvement."

The United States pays a quarter of the UN budget and over 30 per cent of its peace-keeping expenses but is several hundred million dollars in arrears.

Christopher said he would like to reduce the proportion of UN peacekeeping costs borne by Washington and would definitely fight to prevent the US share growing even larger.

Because of its economic plight, Russia has been arguing that it cannot maintain its share of the UN's burgeoning peacekeeping costs.

Christopher said former US Ambassador to Zaire, Melissa Wells, who on Tuesday became UN Undersecretary-General for Administration and Management, would spearhead Washington's drive for greater UN efficiency.

Diplomats said Washington has claimed the post that could most influence the efficiency of the UN administration as to be able to justify to Congress the necessity of paying up US arrears and sending in its dues on time.

BRIEFLY

One more held in WTC blast: The FBI said on Wednesday a third man — identified by news reports as a chemical engineer — was arrested in connection with the World Trade Centre bombing, reports Reuters from New York.

Federal Bureau of Investigation spokesmen declined to give details but CNN reported that the man was Nidil Ayyad, a 25-year-old chemical engineering graduate of Rutgers University from Maplewood, New Jersey.

US to renew China's MFN status: The Clinton administration is ready to support renewing China's most favoured nation status despite the need for "substantial progress" in human rights, a senior official said on Wednesday, reports AFP from Washington.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher said that while the human rights situation in China was "unsatisfactory" isolating China was not a solution to the problem.

However Christopher said the most favoured nation status was an "important tool" in helping to bring about changes. He added that China was making "great progress" in developing a market economy.

The US congress is to vote later this year whether or not to continue China's most favoured nation status.

Georgian PP shot dead: The Public Prosecutor in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi was shot dead on Wednesday night, Itar-Tass news agency said, reports Reuters from Moscow.

Mikhail Kurdadze was killed in the yard near his home after returning from the university where he had given an evening lecture, Tass said, quoting the republic's public prosecutor, Tedi Ninidze.

Ninidze said Kurdadze was shot by a lone assailant. He offered no motive for the killing.

AFP photographers awarded: Agence France-Presse photographers were awarded several prizes in the pictures of the year competition sponsored by the National Press Photographers and the University of Missouri, reports AFP from Washington.

The agency won first prize in the sports category with a shot by Mark Phillips who was also awarded in the United States for the best baseball photo in 1992.

AFP photographers won three awards of excellence: Spot news category went to Mike Person for "Sarajevo: A city on its knees"; Newspaper story went to David Brauchli for "Hillside Massacre" in Nagorno-Karabakh; And Presidential Campaign '92 went to Mike Nelson for his photo of the White House Cant, "Socks, the First Cat".

IRA kills storekeeper: The Irish Republican Army claimed responsibility for killing a Protestant storekeeper in north Belfast Wednesday night. Police said they had arrested three men and a woman in connection with the killing, reports AP from Belfast.

Police headquarters in Belfast said in a statement that Norman Truesdale, 39, was behind the counter of the small corner candy store when gunmen burst in and opened fire, killing him.

The previous owner of the store, Billy Quee, was slain by republican gunmen four years ago.

The IRA fighting British rule in Northern Ireland claimed responsibility for Thursday's killing in a telephone call to a Belfast radio station. The caller did not say why Truesdale was chosen as a target.

Drunken Germans kill Turk: A 56-year-old Turk died after two drunken Germans beat him and threatened him with a firearm at a bus stop in the Western town of Muelheim, police said on Wednesday, reports Reuters from Muelheim, Germany.

The weapon failed to go off, but after the two 21-year-olds left the scene, the Turkish workman collapsed and probably died of a heart-attack, police said.

Prosecutors in nearby Duisburg have ordered an autopsy. Both attackers, who were arrested after the assault on Tuesday evening, had criminal records for theft and assault, police said. One confessed to the attack, police added.

US reporter rejects compromise: A newspaper reporter refused on Wednesday a governor's compromise offer and said he will instead go to jail for 30 days for refusing to reveal his confidential source, reports AFP from Florida.

Tim Roche, 24, refused an offer by Governor Lawton Chiles to perform 300 hours of community service instead of going to prison.

"I'm not trying to be a hero," he said, urging Florida's executive clemency board to "please do the right thing."



JERUSALEM: Palestinian spokeswoman for the Middle East peace talks Hanan Ashrawi announced on Wednesday, the refusal of the Palestinian delegation to attend the talks in Washington April 20. Ashrawi stressed, there still were some outstanding issues referring to the deportation of some 400 Palestinian fundamentalists by Israel December 17, 1992.

— AFP/UNB photo

Gunmen agree to free 2 of 25 hostages

Nicaraguan embassy still under siege

SAN JOSE, Mar 11: A group of hooded gunmen who stormed the Nicaraguan Embassy and seized 25 hostages promised to free two Costa Ricans Thursday to help end the standoff, reports AP.

But the gunmen, opponents of Nicaragua's president, Violeta Chamorro, refused a mediator's suggestion to move to the Roman Catholic Curia to negotiate an end to the siege that began Monday.

An unidentified spokesman for the group said Yamil Jose Alfaro and Johnny Fonseca Amador would be released Thursday morning, but gave no details.

The spokesman discussed the planned releases Wednesday in a television interview. He also promised that Ambassador Alfonso Robelo and the other remaining hostages, all Nicaraguans, would not be hurt.

Earlier reports had said the group took 20 hostages, others later said 23. But the spokesman put the number at 25.

The group, apparently right-wing Nicaraguans unhappy over the Chamorro government's close ties with leftist Sandinistas, demanded the ouster of key presidential aides and a 6 million dollar ransom.

Mrs. Chamorro turned down both demands.

Nicaraguan Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, acting as a mediator, described the standoff as "rather difficult and very tense," and said the attackers were armed with grenades, gasoline and rifles.

Obando y Bravo spoke late Wednesday with Jose Urbina, the group's leader, and offered to move negotiations to the Curia building or the Venezuelan Embassy.

But the spokesman proposed they meet in the Nicaraguan Embassy, and both sides agreed to resume talking early Thursday.

Mrs. Chamorro's 14-party coalition defeated the Sandinistas in 1990 elections that followed a decade of Sandinista rule and civil war with US-backed Contra rebels.

But to the outrage of her supporters, many leftist leaders remain in positions of

power as she tries to keep the country from degenerating again into civil war.

The hostage-takers have demanded the dismissal of Humberto Ortega, the Sandinista Mrs. Chamorro left as head of the army.

They also want the president to oust Antonio Lacayo, the minister of presidency and the real power in his mother-in-law's government.

Suharto sworn in

JAKARTA, Mar 11: President Suharto took the oath of office for his sixth five-year term Thursday and participatory democracy, as practiced in Indonesia, went back into the deep freeze until 1988, reports AP.

In a speech to the People's Consultative Assembly, Suharto said his goal was "to bring the whole nation closer to the realization of a prosperous life imbued with equity and an equity imbued with prosperity."

He acknowledged that at least 27 million of the over 182 million people in the world's fourth most populous nation lived below the poverty line.

"We have to create new jobs for millions of people... we have to distribute development gains more equitably in order to create a tangible social justice, to have greater equity between regions, between groups and between segments of our society," Suharto said.

The country has been stable and made good progress under the 71-year-old former general, but many Indonesians are dissatisfied.



Dozens of students demonstrating in Jakarta to protest the National Assembly's decision to nominate incumbent President Suharto as the sole candidate for the sixth consecutive term.

— Star TV photo

Iran slates West

TEHRAN, Mar 11: Iran's parliamentary Speaker Wednesday slammed what he termed Western psychological warfare aimed at discrediting the country on all fronts and urged Iranian leaders to close ranks, reports AFP.

"The charges about Iran's wish to acquire nuclear arms and resulting Western pressures, as well as accusations of Iranian government involvement in every attack worldwide, reports of human rights violations, the Rushdie affair, are part of a media and political campaign aimed at pressuring US," said Ali Akbar Nategh-Nuri.

The Speaker, who was addressing a session of parliament, said "Westerners are wrong if they think they can bring Iran to its knees."

American Muslims struggle to keep values amid secularism

NEW YORK, Mar 11: Ghazi Khankan is struggling to pass his traditional Islamic values to his children. His adversary, as he sees it, is a permissive, secular society that stereotypes Arabs as terrorists, reports AP.

"Raising children in America is a jihad," Khankan said, using the Arabic word that literally means struggle but has come to mean holy war. That struggle because more difficult when two Muslims were arrested in the World Trade Center bombing that killed at least five people.

Khankan, a Syrian immigrant, said he was outraged by headlines that described the suspects as Arab Muslims. If the situation were different, he asked, would they have said Jewish

or Italian bomber? Khankan spoke by telephone from his house on Long Island, asking that his hometown not be disclosed out of concern that Crabs might be targeted as part of a backlash. "There are crazies out there," he said.

On Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue, the apprehensive among Arabs was even stronger. Dozens of people from doctors to store owners refused to speak with reporters. At the Farooq mosque, a man said the faithful had voted not to talk to the press.

"Please come back when there is peace," asked the man, who identified himself only as Karim.

Like many Muslim parents, Khankan fought hard to make sure that his children grew up aware and proud of

their heritage. He sent his son and daughter to one of the only Islamic schools on Long Island "so they would not feel that they are oddballs, the only Muslims around."

He made sure to take his son to Friday prayers and to buy meat slaughtered according to religious commandments. Khankan and his wife, a Ukrainian convert to Islam, also taught their children a strict morality that precluded dating and parents where the sexes mixed.

But Khankan found himself competing against TV shows and movies portraying what is anathema to many Muslims: a secular and permissive society that according to Khankan tolerated drugs, alcohol and teen

pregnancy. "At the beginning they were rebellious. They were wondering why not," date, Khankan said. But we explained to them that this was inappropriate in our culture."

He said his children, now in their 20s, "didn't like it, but they accepted it."

The Khankans, like many Muslims in America sought to assert their identities in a society they regard as indifferent if not hostile.

"In a society like America where you have to assimilate, like it or not, you dig a bit deeper into your roots as a self-defence mechanism to retain your identity and to preserve it for your children," said Khalil Jahshan, director of National Arab

American Association. Peter Awn, a professor of religion at Columbia University, said America's 1.5 million Muslim Arabs "tend to be a somewhat more observant lot than Americans and the population from which they come."

He said mosque attendance is high in America because "praying is how you are affirming your identity in this mass of people who are so different from you."

Most Arab Muslims came in the late '70s and '80s looking for the economic opportunities and political freedoms they could not find at home.

Musa Ebeld, a grocer in Brooklyn, said he and his wife sit down with their six children once a week to discuss their Palestinian

heritage. Ebeld said he has forbidden his three college-age children to date, but added, "You can't tie them up with a rope. You have to trust them."

Khankan agreed and said he knew of one Muslim girl who ran away from home after her final year of college because her father was so strict.

He said his daughter, a recent graduate of Barnard College wears loose-fitting clothing as a sign of modesty but he does not insist she cover her hair like more traditional Muslims.

We can't smother them, there has to be a give and take, Khankan said. But only God knows what happens when we are not around.

Order to freeze real estate property of Marcos

MANILA, Mar 11: The Philippine government has issued a freeze order on the real estate property of the late deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos after his heirs failed to pay death taxes, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) said today, reports AFP.

BIR Commissioner Jose Ong said the property would be seized and auctioned off by the government if the Marcos family did not settle 23.29 billion pesos (\$31.72 million dollars) in estate taxes in time, but gave no deadline.

I signed 25 warrants of distraint and levy on the real estate property yesterday, Ong said in an interview over radio station DZRH here.