

Top Sikh militant shot dead

CHANDIGARH, Nov 25: Police shot and killed a top Sikh militant Thursday, the latest success in a 2-year-old crack-down that has left most of Punjab's rebel leaders dead or in jail, reports AP.

Satnam Singh, who was wanted in connection with more than 500 killings, died in a shootout in fields outside Khiala Kalan village, state police chief KPS Gill said.

The village is 220 kilometers (135 miles) northwest of Chandigarh, the capital of the northern state of Punjab.

The killing could sound the death knell for the 11-year-old insurrection by Sikh rebels who want to make Punjab an independent Sikh nation called Khalistan, or land of the pure.

Singh was the chief of the Bhindranwale Tiger Force of

Khalistan, one of the half-dozen guerilla groups that operated in Punjab. All of them have lost top leaders in battles with police.

Acting on a tip off, police ambushed the car in which Singh was travelling at about 3 am. Gill said. Singh, who jumped out of the car and ran into the fields, exchanged gun fire with police for 45 minutes before he was killed, said Gill. Many guns and a lot of ammunition were recovered from the car, the police chief said.

No police casualties were reported.

On November 4, police arrested 79-year-old Sohan Singh, the chief of the Panthic Committee, which is accused of commanding and directing the most active Sikh guerilla groups in recent years.



Miss Portugal, Ana Luisa Barbosa Moreira poses with two children Saturday last prior to the Miss World finals scheduled for tomorrow. —AFP photo

S Korea to buy 474 missiles from US

SEOUL, Nov 25: South Korea will buy 474 up-to-date air-to-air missiles from the United States this year to boost its air defence capability, officials here said today, reports AP.

North Korea, meanwhile, accused South Korea of "stepping up war preparations to invade the North," noting the Seoul government had decided to heighten its defence posture against the North last week.

Pyeongyang's ruling Workers' Party organ, the Rodong Shinmun, monitored here, said the editorially that Seoul was seeking confrontation and was obstructing US-North Korea talks aimed at clearing up fears that it was developing nuclear weapons.

A spokesman for the South Korean Defence Ministry said the 474 missiles would include 190 advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles (Amraam)

and 284 short-ranges air-to-air missiles.

South Korea had originally planned to buy the missiles for warplanes in 1995 and 1996, but the US government approved the sale ahead of schedule "in view of the importance of security on the Korean peninsula," the national Vohap news agency quoted another Defence Ministry official as saying.

The US Defence Department said missiles were manufactured by Raytheon Co and the Hughes Aircraft Division of General Motors Corp.

The announcement came on the heels of a summit between President Bill Clinton and South Korean President Kim Young-Suam in Washington, where they discussed North Korea's alleged programme to develop nuclear weapons.

Lanka fears Tamil attack on opposition politicians

COLOMBO, Nov 25: Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe warned today of possible Tamil Tiger attacks against opposition politicians as security across Sri Lanka was tightened amid tension in the capital Colombo, reports AP.

The separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) may target other political leaders because security for President Dingiri Banda Wijetunga and the premier had already been tightened, Wickremesinghe told parliament.

"The terrorists would try to achieve political objectives through violence. We must ensure that violence does not succeed," Wickremesinghe said, adding that steps may be necessary to increase security for all politicians.

The assassination of Presi-

dent Ranasinghe Premadasa on May 1 and the killing of a key opposition figure, Lalith Athulathumudali, a week before, have been blamed on the LTTE.

Since then, security for the new President and the Prime Minister has been raised to unprecedented levels with elite special task force commandos guarding the two men in addition to hundreds of police bodyguards.

Wickremesinghe said more money would have to be spent on protecting politicians because of the constant threat from the LTTE which he said was trying to destabilise the government.

His remarks came as security forces and police across the country maintained a red alert for the second straight day Thursday amid reports of violence in the run up to the 39th

birthday Friday of the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

The LTTE had declared a hero's week to commemorate their fighters who died during the 21-year-old struggle for a separate homeland for minority Tamils.

All security force units and police have been put on full alert and we have intensified road blocks and checks on vehicles. We are taking maximum precautions to prevent any trouble," a defence official said.

A hand written letter sent to embassies there warned that minority Tamils could be attacked Friday and asked foreign governments to intervene. The letter signed by a group called the citizens front Colombo said that attacks had been planned in areas here where Tamils were concentrated.

BOMBAY, Nov 25: Forty-five years after a Hindu extremist assassinated Mohandas K Gandhi, the killer's family is still conducting a campaign to vilify the national hero, reports AP.

At a public meeting organised on November 18 by assassin Nathuram Godse's relatives, speaker after speaker denounced Gandhi, describing him as "worse than a bug" and a "blood sucker".

On Wednesday, police charged Godse's brother, Gopal; his son, Dhananjay; and two friends with spreading communal enmity, and were seeking their arrest. The police deputy commissioner, Surinder Kumar, said the four men have gone underground.

If tried and convicted, they face up to three years imprisonment.

"Even if we had known that only two days were left for Gandhi to die a natural death, we would have sought just two moments to pump two bullets into him," Gopal Godse told the

Gandhi a blood sucker!

meeting attended by scores of people in Bombay.

The extremists have "never displayed such fanaticism, audacity and hatred on a public platform." The Times of India newspaper commented while reporting on the speeches.

Gandhi is revered by millions of Indians as a saint for his non-violent campaign that helped India win freedom from Britain in 1947. But independence also resulted in the partition of India that gave birth to Islamic Pakistan.

Gandhi, who is known worldwide as "mahatma," or "great soul" in Hindi, was shot three times by Godse on January 30, 1948, as he walked with hundreds of followers to a prayer ground.

Godse and his followers represent the fanatical fringe of right-wing Hindu fundamentalism that is gaining strength in

India. But even the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, the largest opposition group in Parliament, has distanced itself from Godse.

"I would think it was in bad taste. Such events are irrelevant. They don't even deserve any comments," BJP vice-president K R Malkani told the Associated Press Thursday.

Godse rejected Gandhi's pacifist views and his advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity and blamed him for the creation of Pakistan. Godse was hanged on November 15, 1949. Gopal Godse, who helped plan the assassination, was imprisoned for 15 years.

Since his release in 1964, Gopal and his friends have held meetings every year in their hometown of Poona, 150 kilometers (90 miles) southeast of Bombay to commemorate Nathuram's hanging.

But November 18 was the first time they held a public meeting in Bombay, India's financial capital, after advertising it in the local press.

UN to step up aid for Kurds

Blues singer Collins dead: Blues singer and guitarist Albert Collins died of cancer at his home in Las Vegas Wednesday. Alligator Records said in a statement. He was 61, AFP reports from Las Vegas.

One of the world's most respected bluesmen, musician magazine once called Collins "the most powerful blues guitarist in the world."

His early hits included the 1961 song "Get your business straight."

Quake shakes Japan: An earthquake registering 4.8 on the Richter scale shook western Japan yesterday but there were no reports of injuries or damages, the meteorological agency said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The epicenter of the quake, which occurred at 11.51 am (0251 GMT), was 10 kilometers underground between Totтори and Hyogo prefectures, the agency said.

Russian voters favour reformists

MOSCOW, Nov 25: Aggressively pro-reform blocs could capture nearly half the seats in the new parliament that Russians will elect on December 12, according to a nationwide poll of urban voters published Thursday, reports AP.

Russia's Choice, which includes several high-ranking officials in the administration of President Boris Yeltsin, was chosen by 29.2 per cent of the poll respondents, while the bloc headed by free-market reformer Grigory Yavlinsky was picked by 20.5 per cent.

The poll, published in the Moscow daily Segodnya, suggests that hard-line parties, including the Communists, could together win at least a tenth of the seats in the new State Duma.

More than 26 per cent of the people queried from November 13 to November 23 by the Vt-siom polling firm said they didn't know yet who they planned to vote for.

Angolan talks appear to be in trouble

LUSAKA, Nov 25: Talks to end Angola's civil war appeared to be in trouble after an Angolan envoy accused UNITA rebels of launching fresh military attacks while talking peace in Lusaka, reports Reuter.

Pedro Fernando Mavunza, Angola's ambassador to Zambia, broke a news blackout to say the peace talks had produced nothing and UNITA was only trying to distract public opinion.

"On the negotiating table they (UNITA) are simply trying to divert international public opinion," he told a news conference on Wednesday in Zambia's capital Lusaka, venue of the talks.

This is the second week of the peace talks. Upto now nothing (useful) is coming up," Mavunza said.

He accused UNITA of fresh military action, saying it was attempting to extract concessions from the government at the slow-moving negotiations that opened on November 15.

"In the past two weeks since the peace talks started, UNITA has intensified the fighting in the central province of Huila, in Mexico in the east and in Bie and Cuando Cubango in the south," he said.

"They are doing this in order to put pressure on the government so that it grants them their demands at these talks. They want to share power with the government or are trying to set up a separate state within a state," he added.

A government statement earlier accused UNITA of recent attacks in seven provinces, killing 30 people, wounding 48 and kidnapping 20 others.

Meanwhile, western aid workers were evacuated from the besieged devastated city of Cuito after fresh fighting erupted there following virtually two months of an uneasy truce.

The evacuees, who included British nurses and several workers of Medicines Sans Frontieres, said they had not been threatened by UNITA and they could return soon.

UN to step up aid for Kurds

BAGHDAD, Nov 25: The United Nations is to step up aid to Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, thanks to new commitments by donor nations, the UN's relief coordinator in Iraq Mohamed Zejjari said Wednesday, reports AP.

Zejjari said the UN had received pledges of 180 million dollars for Iraq, of which 70 per cent was specifically for the north.

That would help the agency more than double the number of beneficiaries, from the current 300,000 to 750,000, he said.

Elsewhere in the country, only 294,000 are receiving aid, well below the half a million people targeted by the UN in its annual programme for April 1993 to March 1994.

The aid programme for the entire country is budgeted at 490 million dollars. The Kurdish-controlled region needs aid

Many white South Africans prefer separate homeland

PRETORIA, Nov 25: Twenty-eight per cent of white South Africans favour the creation of a separate white homeland, a Markinor-gallup poll has found, state-run SABC Radio reported Wednesday, says AFP.

But, the report added, only 22 per cent of the 800 whites interviewed by telephone believed a white homeland was a viable option. Fourteen per cent were prepared to move to a white homeland.

The poll found a white state had support across all segments of the white population but more males than females were prepared to move to a homeland while older people and those in better income groups were less keen to move.

Whites comprise some five million people of South Africa's total population of around 39 million.

UN envoy refused access to Myanmar detenus

BANGKOK, Nov 25: A United Nations envoy has complained of being refused full access to political detainees in Myanmar, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest in Yangon since July 1989, reports AP.

Yojo Yokota, special rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, cited the "many serious restrictions and grave violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms continuing in Myanmar."

A copy of Yokota's statement, delivered Wednesday, was received here today. The visit to Myanmar took place November 9-16.

Yokota expressed "disappointment" at being unable to see Aung San Suu Kyi as well as other political leaders detained or recently released, their lawyers and families "due to

fear felt by them of possible subsequent repercussions."

The report noted "some developments which may lead to improvements" in the human rights situation in Myanmar, including an agreement under UN auspices for the voluntary repatriation of more than 200,000 Myanmar refugees from Bangladesh.

"While there are signs of relaxation of restrictions and some progress in economic, social and cultural rights, many civil and political rights are still severely restricted," Yokota said, citing among others the rights to freedom of thought, expression and freedom of assembly.

The UN envoy reported meeting many high-level government officials and being allowed to visit Insein prison to see political leaders Tin U and Aung Khin Sing.

Drug claims 14 in Japan

Storm kills 32 in Vietnam: At least 32 people died and 31 were injured after Tropical Storm Kyle pounded Vietnam's central provinces, sweeping away boats and electric power poles, the official Vietnam News Agency reported, AP reports from Bangkok.

The storm, with winds of more than 120 kilometers (67 miles) an hour hit Khan Hoa province Tuesday, leaving 67 people missing. It ripped off the roofs of 1,200 houses and destroyed more than 1,500 hectares (3,707 acres) of ripening rice fields. Communications was knocked out as more than 50 high-voltage power poles were ripped out of the ground.

The storm also battered the neighbouring provinces of Phu Yen and Darlac, the news agency reported.

Drug claims 14 in Japan: Use of an anti-cancer drug in combination with a new medication to fight the disease shingles has killed at least 14 people, officials said Thursday, AP reports from Tokyo.

The Health and Welfare Ministry in July approved the manufacture and sale of the drug BV-araU, which is used for treatment of shingles, a painful condition which causes blisters along the paths of nerves and is caused by the chicken pox virus.

From the start of its distribution in Japan, the drug carried warnings against its use with the cancer-fighting drug fluorouracil.



Indonesian President Suharto (2nd L) meets with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (R) on Wednesday as Iranian President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani (L) looks on. Suharto is on a four-day official visit to Iran. —AFP photo

Off the Record

Jackson's largest deal

LOS ANGELES: Michael Jackson, embroiled in sex and drug addiction scandals, managed to pull off the largest deal in music publishing history Wednesday, reports Reuter.

As lawyers for a 13-year-old boy who accuses Jackson in a civil lawsuit of sexually molesting him prepared to take depositions from witnesses, the pop superstar became richer by more than US 100 million dollar, the singer's associates said.

Jackson's company, MJJ Enterprises, announced that the singer was moving his music publishing operation, ATV music, to EMI music publishing in a deal worth more than 200 US million dollars.

Jackson's business lawyer, John Branca, said, "guaranteed cash advances to Michael (from the deal) are in excess of US dollar 100 million."

EMI will administer ATV's 4,000-title music catalogue, which includes the bulk of the classic Lennon-McCarthy Beatles compositions as well as songs from Little Richard, Elvis Presley, Keeny Rogers, the Pointer Sisters and UB40.

The US dollar 200-million deal surpasses a previous industry record of US 39 million dollar for the Elton John-Bernie Taupin catalogue.

It emphasises the size and power of the Jackson empire even as its chief receives treatment in seclusion in Europe for addiction to pain killing drugs and faces the increasing prospect of criminal charges of child sex abuse.

Fake documents, no problem!

MANILA: Need a US visa or other official documents? Come to "Le France Trading Company" in Manila and get them quickly for a fee. One problem: they're fake, reports AP.

Manila abounds in small underground companies fabricating passports, birth certificates, school transcript of records, diplomas, licences and other documents.

In a court testimony Thursday, a confidential secretary of the Le France trading company said her firm dealt with "sensitive thing especially illegal activities."

"We engage in illegal (employment) recruitment, producing fake passports, travel documents and tampering visas to the US," said Lenny Pagtakhan. "When one wants to travel to the States, we tamper the visas, remove the picture and just change the picture in the passport."

US visas are sought-after in the Philippines because Filipinos are the fastest growing Asian immigrant group in the United States.

Ms Pagtakhan testified as part of a government case against a police general and a colonel arraigned for the kidnapping of a Taiwanese businessman last May.

Ms. Pagtakhan's employers, Francisco Mateo and wife Lavinia, were accused as part of kidnapping of Chou Chun-Yih who was released after paying 2.9 million Hong Kong dollars.

Body to probe attacks on UN men in Somalia

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 25: The Chief Justice of Zambia and two generals who formerly headed UN peacekeeping operations were appointed on Wednesday members of a commission of inquiry into armed attacks against UN personnel in Somalia, reports Reuter.

Chief Justice Matthew S W Nguibe will serve as chairman.

The other two members of the panel are retired general Emmanuel Erskine of Ghana, who has headed both the UN Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) in the Middle East and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and General Gustav Hagglund of Finland.

Island colonies prefer to stay hooked to British Empire

LONDON, Nov 25: Three decades after the end of empire, a dozen scattered island colonies held their first conference Wednesday — linked by an unfashionable aspiration: how best to stay hooked to the motherland, reports AP.

"No country that moved to independence in the last 30 years has any success stories," said Thomas Jefferson, the leader from the Cayman Islands, a colony an hour's flight from Miami that has grown rich on banking and tourism. "We see no benefit in moving on."

Others put it less bluntly at the one-day, getting acquainted meeting.

"We forget emotions about independence and look at it in

cost-benefit terms," said Reuben T. Meade, Chief Minister of Montserrat, recalling 12-million pounds (dhrs 18 million) of British aid when a hurricane struck in 1989.

No one — even feisty Gibraltar which suspects that Britain might dump it one day in a deal with Spain — came to talk about independence, freedom, self-determination or any other favourite slogans of the 60s.

The roll call was reminiscent of quiz show teasers and Caribbean package vacation ads: Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, St. Helena and the Falkland Islands were the other British possessions. Vestiges of other European

empires also came: Martinique, in the Caribbean, the Pacific island of New Caledonia, both French, and Netherlands Antilles.

And so did Australia's Norfolk Islands, a former penal colony which Queen Victoria allocated to British mutineers from a sailing ship, the Bounty, in 1856. Their descendants' loyalty to the British Crown is undimmed through the generations.

Now, says John Brown, a member of the islands' nine-strong local council, the 2,000 islanders fear Australia will become a republic at the end of the decade, removing Victoria's great-granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth II, as head of state. "We're not kidding ourselves

that England would really want us," Brown said good-humouredly. "But we'd want to find some arrangement... Her Majesty gave us the island in perpetuity and we are Crown subjects."

In all, the ministers and council members came from outposts where plumed governors still govern and with populations totalling not much more than 500,000.

Hong Kong with 5.8 million people, didn't bother — it's due to be handed over to China in 1997. "We didn't see the point. Our future is very clearly mapped out," said Ranjit Peres, spokesman for the colony's London office.

The Falkland Islands and Gibraltar sponsored the meet-

ing, and others chipped in. Morning coffee was by courtesy of the Cayman Islands, and Bermuda paid for the tea.

Hong Kong has to go under old treaties with China. But British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd noted that the others have a choice about staying.

"We have open minds, though of course not open purses," Hurd told the Depend Territories' Conference.

They hang on through mixtures of fear, pragmatism or because they are so tiny — St. Helena has fewer than 6,000 people.

For Britain, enduring loyalty can be expensive.

The Falkland Islands, recaptured from Argentine invaders

in 1982, now costs London 65 million pounds (dhrs 100 million) to maintain a garrison on the remote archipelago. The population is 2000.

Bits of the shrunken empire are very rich, headed by the 27,000-population Cayman Islands, the world's fifth largest banking centre.

Gibraltar, population 31,000, would rather stay British than its only alternative under an 18th century treaty — being given to Spain which claims the 2.25 square mile (5.8 sq. km) rock at the tip of the Iberian Peninsula.

"We small people need a link with a big state," said Gibraltar Chief Minister Joe Bassano. "It's better to stick with the one you've had for 300 years.

Abkhazia violates human rights: UN

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 25: Serious human rights violations are common in the breakaway republic of Abkhazia, where separatists have been fighting the Georgian government, the United Nations said Wednesday, reports AP.

UN investigators who visited Abkhazia last month, reported that civilians, including women, children and the elderly and other non-combatants had been killed, attacked and lost their property rights.

The United Nations blamed both Abkhazian and Georgian government forces for the human rights violations against all ethnic groups in the area.

Separatist forces defeated Tbilisi government troops in September to achieve control of Abkhazia.