

International

US executing innocent people under death penalty: Amnesty

LONDON, Jan 14: The human rights group Amnesty International today accused the United States of executing innocent and mentally ill people under a death penalty which it said was arbitrary, racist and more expensive than imprisonment, reports Reuter.

Amnesty said it had written to President Bill Clinton calling for an urgent presidential commission into the use of the death penalty, which it has always opposed.

With slim prospects of persuading the US government to outlaw executions, the London-based pressure group instead highlighted various key problems in the way the penalty was used.

One death-row man was cleared last year but other innocent people had gone to the electric chair, Amnesty said, and it criticised the US for ex-

30 killed as bus, truck collide in Thailand

BANGKOK, Jan 14: More than 30 people were killed, including at least two foreigners, when a luxury tour bus collided head on with a heavy truck early today police and tour company sources said, reports Reuter.

Highway police in Tak province, 420 KM (260 miles) north of Bangkok, said the accident occurred when the Bangkok-bound tour bus was in collision at full speed with the truck.

BRIEFLY

Yeltsin to visit US: Russian President Boris Yeltsin will make a state visit to the United States next autumn, US President Bill Clinton announced in Moscow Friday, AFP reports.

The two leaders also agreed to meet at the group of seven summit in Naples later this year, he said.

"I look forward to these meetings," Clinton said at a news conference with Yeltsin.

Two killed in ROK plane crash: A South Korean light plane crashed into a rice field Friday, killing two people on board, Yonhap, the country's domestic news agency, said. Reuter reports from Seoul.

The two-seater aircraft, owned by a textile company in the southeastern city of Taeju, was on a test flight near the airport in the city, Yonhap said.

Bodo rebels kill 8 in Assam: Tribal separatist guerrillas in India's Northeastern state of Assam killed eight people, said to be Muslims, and dumped their bodies in a river, government officials said on Thursday, Reuter reports from New Delhi.

Officials said guerrillas of the Bodo Security Force (BSF) rounded up nine labourers from Kokrajhar district in lower Assam and took them to the banks of Bhu river where they shot them.

The guerrillas threw the bodies into the river, officials said, quoting the sole survivor of the attack, Shakher Ali, who was severely wounded.

2 Palestinians killed in WB: Two Palestinians were killed and an Israeli soldier was wounded late Thursday during clashes between the army and pro-Hamas militants in Hebron, in the southern West Bank, Palestinians said. AFP reports from Jerusalem.

This brought Thursday's toll in separate incidents in the occupied territories to two Palestinians dead and six wounded, and four Israeli soldiers wounded, according to military and Palestinian sources.

The latest clash pitted the army against militants of the Ezzedin Al Kassam group, the armed wing of the Hamas Islamic Resistance Movement which opposes the agreement on limited Palestinian autonomy in the occupied territories.

Arafat to visit Canada: Palestine Liberation Organisation leader Yasser Arafat will make his first visit to Canada in the next few months. A Foreign Ministry spokesman said Thursday. Reuter reports from Ottawa.

The visit will focus on cooperation in securing Middle East peace, including Canadian support for Palestinian autonomy and the establishment of democratically accountable institutions, spokesman Rodney Moore said.

He said no date has been fixed yet for Arafat's visit to Ottawa, but it will most likely be in the spring.

Arafat will meet with Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chretien who invited him to visit Canada.

Two killed in Gaza: A Palestinian stabbed to death an Israeli civilian and wounded a second at an entrance to the occupied Gaza Strip yesterday, Israeli security sources said. Reuter reports from Jerusalem.

They said the Palestinian attacker was also killed but could not say who killed him.

Ntaryamira new Burundian President

BUJUMBURA, Jan 14: Burundi's parliament chose a new civilian president on Thursday to replace Melchior Ndayave, slain by members of the armed forces in an October coup which collapsed after triggering a frenzy of ethnic bloodletting, reports Reuter.

Agriculture and Livestock Minister Cyprien Ntaryamira, 38, was elected head of state for a five-year term after Burundi's ruling and opposition parties agreed on his candidacy.

Ntaryamira is from the Hutu majority like Ndayave.



Afghan Premier Gulbuddin Hekmatyar addresses a press conference at his headquarters in Chahar Siab, south of Kabul in Afghanistan Jan 12. Hekmatyar, the arch rival of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, said that the only solution of this war is the immediate resignation of the president.

— AFP photo

Artillery duel rends Kabul

KABUL, Jan 14: Afghan state and rival faction jets bombed each other's positions in Kabul late today, prior to a fierce artillery duel that raged four hours non-stop in the eastern suburbs of the capital, reports AFP.

Lone jets of rival faction leader, ex-communist General Abdul Rashid Dostum made at least three sorties over Kabul Friday. Shortly after midnight, and around 5.00 AM and 8.30 AM local time — while a state jet was said to have bombed Dostum bases at 9.30 AM.

A lone jet again circled Kabul at 2.00 PM and 3.00 PM but with the prevailing artillery

bombardment it was difficult to tell which faction it belonged to, and where it dropped its bomb load.

In the night time Dostum raids the Kabul sky was illuminated by streaming arcs of scarlet tracer fire as Defence Ministry anti-aircraft guns sprayed cannon shells at the attacker, which at midnight locals say dropped a deadly cluster-bomb on the dormant capital, reports AFP.

A Russian-trained jet pilot himself, General Ayubzai claimed Dostum's main airbases in Mazar-i-Sharif and Shebhar-ghan in northern Afghanistan had been knocked out by pro-Rabbani jets.

He said Dostum had only two or three Russian-made Sukhoi SU-22 jets that were operational, and which take off from a makeshift desert run-

Rabbani.

"These raids are designed to weaken the moral of the civilians. They cannot inflict heavy casualties on our military forces," said duty officer General Mohammad Sawar Ayubzai.

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The ministry duty officer at Kabul Airport said the Dostum jet raids were not effective against bases manned by forces loyal to President Burhanuddin

way near Shebhar-ghan, the capital of Dostum's native Jawzjan province.

In addition he admitted Dostum had three Russian-made Antonov transport aircraft, one of which, an AN-32, had managed a landing south of the Charasib headquarters of Dostum's ally, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

The AN-32, capable of carrying 45 soldiers, escaped interception in this dangerous airfield by "flying at low altitude" in order to ferry either reinforcements or supplies to Dostum, the airport duty officer said.

'One third Americans mentally ill'

CHICAGO, Jan 14: Almost a third of Americans are mentally ill in any given year, according to the most far-reaching report on US mental health in 10 years, reports AFP.

The survey found that almost half of Americans have suffered some sort of mental illness at some time in their lives.

Researchers conducted in-person interviews with 8,098 people aged 15 to 54 across the country between September 1990 and February 1992.

They looked for 14 of the most common illnesses, including depression, alcoholism and fear of mixing with other people.

The study found that 48 per cent had at least one disorder at some time and that 29.5 per cent had been mentally ill within the last 12 months.

Off the Record

Dentist pays for her own killing

ATHENS: A 40-year-old Athens dentist paid for her own killing because she believed she was incapable of committing suicide, police said here Thursday, reports AFP.

Georgia Vangelis-Spirrouli, who believed her husband was having an affair, paid a 38-year-old parking employee to kill her, according to the police who have arrested the man.

The victim, shot three times in the back on Tuesday, reportedly provided the alleged killer with the weapon and spent several weeks talking him into killing her.

Vangelis-Spirrouli had told both her mother and psychologist she intended paying someone to kill her.

Police said the alleged murderer tried 10 times in as many days to do away with the victim in several isolated spots, before finally shooting her some way out of town.

Drinking session ends in bloodshed

CEBU (Philippines): A drinking session ended in bloodshed when a construction worker went berserk, hacking two friends to death before police shot him in the legs to subdue him, a spokeswoman in this central Philippines city said Friday, reports AFP.

Alfredo Naquila, 31, a construction worker in the neighbouring island of Bohol, was drinking with two friends when he suddenly went into a rage, seized a machete and hacked them to death, senior inspector Marietta Aguilara said.

Police arrived but Naquila refused to surrender and attacked them, forcing police to shoot him four times in the legs. He was taken to Bohol hospital.

Chinese cannibal executed

BEIJING: Chinese police have tracked down a man who killed eight persons and ate the brains of two of his victims, the Heilongjiang Legal News said, reports AFP.

Hao Kai, 34, a former prisoner released on parole who turned his talents to selling mutton kebabs began his bloody crimes in February 1993 in Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang province, it said.

He strangled a prostitute, cut her body up into pieces, opened up her skull and ate her brains but did not find the meal to his liking, the paper said in its latest edition, received here today.

A worker on Hao's kebab stall had the misfortune to happen upon the grisly find just two hours later and was also stabbed to death.

Over the next nine months, the cannibal went on a killing spree, slaying six other people, including his wife. Each of them was chopped into pieces.

His last victim was a friend from whom he wanted to borrow money, Heilongjiang Legal News said.

Hao this time decided to fry the man's brains, choosing to add some spices in order to improve the taste, the report said.

But his killing days are over. He was sentenced to death on December 23, and execution was carried out immediately.

Whales' forefathers may have walked on land

WASHINGTON: A recent fossil find of ancient whale ancestors shows that the giant mammal's forefathers may have walked on land, according to a report published this week in the Journal of Science, reports AFP.

This critter is a missing link between land animals and modern whales," said J G M Thewissen, a researcher with northeastern Ohio University.

The fossil, estimated to be some 50 million years old, was found at the site of an ancient sea in Pakistan. Thewissen said the creature was about the size of a large male sea lion, weighing between 270-315 kilograms (400-700 pounds).

"It is a very complete specimen and has enough of the anatomy to teach us something about how the animal moved on land," said Thewissen.

The Ambulocetus Natans, as the researcher calls them, had large feet and fully developed legs in the rear and stubby front feet joined almost to the shoulders.

Indian troops killed 1075 Kashmiris last year

NEW DELHI, Jan 14: Indian Security Forces killed 1,075 Muslim rebels and arrested 2,426 militants last year in the northern state of Kashmir, which has been ravaged by a bloody separatist drive, the Press Trust of India said Thursday, reports AFP.

Indian troops, comprising army soldiers, paramilitary forces and border guards, shot dead 1,075 guerrillas in 1993 — double the previous year's figure. 54. Lieutenant General Surinder Singh said.

Separation-linked violence in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, claimed more than 2,600 lives in 1993, he added.

The disputed state is claimed by both India and Pakistan, which have fought two of their three wars over it since their 1947 independence from British Rule.

Singh said the army had foiled 34 attempted border crossings by Pakistani troops and militants trained by Islamabad, leading to the deaths of 161 rebels and 28 Pakistani commandos.

"(Kashmir) is totally under the army's control," the head of India's Northern Command said in an interview in an army town.

The fighters follow recent official updates released on January 5, which said more than 8,100 people had died in the Himalayan state since 1990.

when a Muslim-separatist campaign became violent.

Rights groups and social activists charge Indian troops with violating human rights in Kashmir and killing suspected militants while in custody. A common slogan of Kashmiri Muslims is "stop custodial deaths".

Zhirinovsky cold-shouldered by US leaders

MOSCOW, Jan 14: Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky was cold-shouldered by US leaders late Thursday and deemed unworthy to take part in an official reception in honour of US President Bill Clinton, reports AFP.

"We didn't invite Zhirinovsky because his actions and his language and his statements do not make him fit to be in a meeting (with) or invited by the president of the United States," said Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Aleksey Mitrofanov, snubbed an invitation to the reception in the home of the US ambassador in Moscow.

But among those present was the leader of the Communist Party Gennady Zyuganov.

India to have world's largest number of AIDS carriers by yr end

NEW DELHI, Jan 14: India will not be free of it for several decades now," he said.

The IHO set up in 1982, has been working with AIDS patients and high-risk groups such as prostitutes since 1985, mainly in Bombay.

Police said that 150 arrest warrants had been issued, including some against people already jailed on charges of maintaining links with Mafia groups or engaging in drug trafficking.

The swoop began early Friday in Lombardy but later spread to other regions, including Piedmont in the north and Calabria in the south of the country.

Ntaryamira new Burundian President

BOMBAY, Jan 14: India will have the world's largest number of AIDS carriers by the end of the year, with some four million people likely to be infected with the virus, according to a prominent authority on the disease, reports AFP.

There were an estimated two million HIV-positive cases in India at the end of 1993 and international trends show the number doubles every year, said Dr. Ishwarprasad Gilada, head of the private Indian Health Organisation (IHO).

Gilada's estimates contrast dramatically with the official figures of the Indian govern-

ment, which acknowledges just 14,000 HIV-positive cases and 529 sufferers of full-blown AIDS.

Gilada, India's leading anti-AIDS campaigner, claimed the official figures were deceptive and did not provide even a hint of the disaster facing the country.

Explaining the discrepancy, he said: "This is because as yet there is no compulsory testing or reporting."

These (official) figures show only the results of voluntary testing, something very few people will go in for due to the stigma attached to an HIV

positive patient," he said.

Gilada said the IHO came up with its own estimates through projections based on random testing in urban areas.

"Lack of zeal and commitment by the government, poor social awareness and inadequate infrastructure are the main causes of the rapid spread of the deadly virus," Gilada added.

Gilada said the official response to the looming AIDS disaster was shortsighted and mixed in red tape.

New Delhi's AIDS control programme has a budget of only 2.2 billion rupees (75 million dollars) for five years, meaning an allocation of only 450 million rupees (15 million dollars) every year.

This is pathetically inadequate," he said.

India does not yet have a national law requiring compulsory testing of blood in blood banks. Even the poorest of African nations demands compulsory blood testing.

The IHO estimates that between 80 and 85 per cent of the HIV positive cases in India were sexually transmitted. 10 per cent resulted from contaminated blood received during heart surgery in the United States.

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