

Shiv Sena continues violence against lower caste Hindus

BOMBAY, Jan 16: Sectarian violence continued for a second day today in the western Indian state of Maharashtra over the renaming of a university after a leader of low caste Hindus, reports AFP.

Activists of the Hindu fundamentalist Shiv Sena (Shiva's army) Party continued a terror campaign against lower caste Hindus burning railway stations, homes and destroying public property, police said.

The attacks in the Marathwada region, comprising seven districts of the coastal state, were sparked by the renaming of the Marathwada University after Babasaheb Ambedkar, a champion of socially-oppressed Hindus.

The Shiv Sena announced a general strike in the region following the Friday decision to rename the university by

Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar, a ruling Congress (I) Party heavyweight.

Shiv Sena member burnt two railway stations in Parbhani district as infuriated crowds burnt about 30 houses of low caste Hindus, or untouchables, in adjoining Nanded, reports said.

They also torched some Buddhist temples and broke statues of Ambedkar, who is admired for his social crusade as well as for single-handedly drafting the Indian constitution. Many lower cast Hindus have converted to Buddhism.

More than 40 incidents of arson and attacks were reported on Saturday with railway stations, public buses and government offices being set on fire and effigies of Pawar burnt across the state.

Some 2,000 Sena workers

Meanwhile, the renaming of the university after a two-decade-old campaign — marked by suicides and other extreme forms of protest — was welcomed by lower caste Hindus.

They were arrested but the attacks have spilled over into new regions of Maharashtra's 30 districts. Party leader Bal Thackeray is planning to hold public meetings in Marathwada on Tuesday, defying a government ban.

The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) a Shiv Sena ally, backed the decision saying it was a welcome step.

BJP spokesman K L Sharma made an appeal for the restoration of "peace and harmony" and said he hoped "good sense would prevail and the controversy and confrontation on the issue end soon."



US President Bill Clinton (R) and Syrian President Hafez al-Assad (L) open their talks to revive the Arab-Israeli peace process on Sunday in Geneva. Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara (2nd L) and US Secretary of State Warren Christopher (2nd R) attend the meeting. (other officials are unidentified). — AFP photo

'US-Syria summit an opportunity to advance ME peace'

NICOSIA, Jan 16: The US-Syria summit in Geneva represents a key opportunity to advance Middle East peace, but will only succeed if Washington can pressure Israel into pursuing a full land-for-peace deal, leading Middle East Arab dailies said Saturday, reports AFP.

Another Syrian paper, in Damascus, the daily Ath-Thawra said Syria's position was clear: "a just and comprehensive peace, not a separate compromise, not secret negotiations and no terms of reference."

It said Washington must assume its responsibility and make Israel comply with international resolutions.

The summit implies that the United States "play the role" of full partner, by obliging Syria, which is hampering progress in the peace process, to conform with the basis of the American initiative, notably a complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab lands," the paper said.

Another Syrian paper, Tishrin, said the joint statement following this week's meeting in Moscow between Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin stressed "the United States" concern not to waste the opportunity made available by the peace process to achieve stability and security in the region."

On Friday, the United States

and Russia, co-sponsors of the peace process, called for a comprehensive, just and durable peace in the Middle East.

In Lebanon, the major media sent correspondents to cover the summit but newspapers did not editorialise on it.

The wide circulation An-Nahar just cited Syrian officials' statements pointing to the "rare opportunity to revive the peace process."

But the pro-Syrian As-Safir said the Geneva talks would focus on several key points: the peace process, Syrian-US ties and the future of the region. They would also deal with the

nature of future ties between the Arabs and Israel as well as between the Arabs and Iran and Turkey.

In Amman, the Daily Sawt Al-Shaab said in an editorial that the summit, aimed at reviving the deadlocked Syrian-Israeli peace talks, was "a precious opportunity for the American administration to prove its credibility to the Arabs and the world."

It said Washington was being asked to put pressure on Israel, "which does not stop placing obstacles in front of the peace train, the latest one being its slowness in implementing the autonomy accords"

BRIEFLY

8 die in chopper crash: A Russian made military helicopter crashed in Northern Colombia Saturday, killing eight including two top military officials and a judge, the Ministry of Defence said, Reuter reports from Bogota.

The helicopter piloted by two Russians belonged to a battalion in Sogamoso, about 90 miles (150 km) north of the capital.

The helicopter was carrying food, arms and explosives toward the northern part of the country, where the army fought several days ago against rebels operating in the region, an army official said in an interview.

Fire claims 5 in Tokyo: A blaze, believed to have been started deliberately, left five people dead and injured three others when it destroyed a two-story wooden structure housing a snack bar here early Sunday police said, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Five family members of the bar's 58-year-old operator Terumi Fuji were burnt to death in the fire which started in the bar before dawn, police said. The victims were sleeping upstairs.

Fujita and two others suffered injuries, police said, adding that three other apartment houses were the subject of suspect arson cases in the same area early Sunday.

Quakes shake Pennsylvania: Two light earthquakes shook southeastern Pennsylvania Saturday night. There were no immediate reports of injuries or damages, AP reports from Philadelphia.

The first quake measured 4.0 on the Richter scale and hit at 7:43 pm (0043 GMT), said John Minsch, a spokesman for the National Earthquake Information Centre in Golden, Colorado the second quake measured 4.6 on the Richter scale and hit at 8:49 pm, he said.

The earthquakes' epicenters were near Wyomissing Hills, just west of Reading, Minsch said. Reading is 50 miles (80 kms) northwest of Philadelphia.

French woman killed in Algeria: A French woman was shot dead in Algiers on Saturday, security forces said, Reuter reports from Algiers.

The woman, who worked at the French consulate in the capital, was hit by two bullets in the head as she was parking her car.

The woman, Monique Mercelin, 45, was the fourth French national to be killed since last September. Twenty-five foreigners have died since then in political violence which officials blame on Muslim fundamentalists.

US singer Nilsson dead: American singer-songwriter Harry Nilsson, best known for his theme to the film "Midnight Cowboy," died in Los Angeles, his London music publisher said on Saturday. He was 52, Reuter reports from London.

An Eaton Music spokeswoman told Reuters that Nilsson died in his sleep in the early hours of Saturday morning at his home in Los Angeles. He had recently suffered a heart attack, she said.

Arabs meet to face cultural challenges

BEIRUT, Jan 16: Culture Ministers or their representatives from all Arab countries assembled here today to discuss a united strategy against cultural challenges which the Arab world is facing, reports Xinhua.

The ninth conference of Arab ministers of culture is held at a time when a speeding-up separation among the Arab countries and a "cultural aggression" from the western world after the cold war and since the end of 1990-1991 Gulf crisis have aroused anxiety among Arab scholars, especially those in the conservative Gulf states.

In a written speech to the opening ceremony, Lebanese President Elias Hraw called for a unity of the Arab world to meet the challenges in the cultural field.

The continuity of the Arab culture had to be maintained or the "Arab cultural characteristics" would be lost, he said in the speech, which was read out by Lebanese Culture Minister Michel Edded.

The Lebanese government is expected to utilise the opportunity that the four-day Arab culture ministers conference is held in its country to reactivate its efforts to restore Beirut's role as a cultural centre in the Arab world.

Lebanon is the only Arab country where Christians constitute nearly half of its population.

Arabs meet to face cultural challenges

West provoking unrest: Gaddafi

TRIPOLI, Jan 16: Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi has accused the West of provoking unrest in Libya, Somalia, Algeria and Egypt, the official news agency Jana reported Friday, says AFP.

Major's authority has been weakened since the beginning of the year by a string of sex and financial scandals involving top Conservative politicians — all the more embarrassing coming just after he launched a key campaign for traditional values.

But Sunday's newspapers held little relief.

The tabloid People newspaper reported that another ruling Conservative member of parliament had fathered a

Anti-racists, neo-Nazis clash in UK

LONDON, Jan 16: Anti-racist demonstrators fought with British, German and Dutch neo-Nazis who had gathered in east London Saturday for a rock concert, Press Association reported, says AP.

There were disturbances in east and central London as hundreds of police tried to keep both groups apart, the national news agency said.

Police said the clashes involved hundreds on each side and at least seven people were arrested for public order offences. Police said one officer suffered a head injury.

About 130 neo-Nazis, including groups from Holland and Germany, gathered at the Piper, a pub in east London, only to find that the right-wing concert due to be held there was cancelled, police said.

At the East Ham underground train station in that area, passengers covered as supporters of the extreme right-wing British National Party ripped out seats and threw them at anti-racist demonstrators who had been headed to

the concert to protest.

Members of Youth Against Racism in Europe and the Anti-Nazi League were taunted and responded by throwing bricks, the news agency said.

In Bow, also in east London, officers in riot gear surrounded a second pub where dozens of neo-Nazis were drinking, to keep them apart from about 100 anti-fascist demonstrators outside, Press Association said.

Police buses took the right wingers to main line train stations to enable them to leave London, it said.

Police Chief Superintendent Sidney Mackay said, "There has

been sporadic disorder occurring in east and central London as a result of a concert which has been organised by right-wing groups."

More violence broke out when about 400 anti-racist protesters were herded onto a special underground train, which took them non-stop from the area where the rock concert had been scheduled, to the Earls Court underground station in southwest London, the news agency said.

At Earls Court, which was closed to the public, the demonstrators were herded onto the street and a handful

began spitting and throwing some cans, it said.

About 40 officers charged at the crowd with truncheons drawn, and riot police chased one group down the road outside, the agency said. Calm returned within about half an hour.

One policeman suffered a head injury, police said.

British National Party, which won its first seat on an east London government council in September, advocates the expulsion of all blacks and Jews and stricter punishment for crime — including the return of the death penalty.

The ballot followed a series of racial attacks in the district in London's impoverished East End, where Bangladeshi, Indian and Caribbean immigrants have settled among working-class whites.

In October, more than 60 people were injured in street fighting as police struggled to keep Anti-Nazi League protesters from marching past the British National Party headquarters in Welling, southeast London.

Sujata first woman Chief Justice of Bombay HC

BOMBAY, Jan 16: Justice Sujata Manohar was sworn as the Chief Justice of the Bombay High Court by the Maharashtra Governor Dr P C Alexander at an impressive function at Rajbhavan here yesterday, reports PTI.

She is the first woman Justice to head the Bombay High Court, since its inception more than a century ago.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended, among others, by the wife of the governor Akkamma Alexander, Chief Minister Sharad Pawar and his wife Paratibaha, Housing Minister Chhagan Bhujabadi.

Justice Sujata Manohar succeeds Justice Manojkumar Mukherjee.

Plea for Major's resignation over a string of scandals

LONDON, Jan 16: Bad news piled up for Britain's Prime Minister John Major with a new controversy over his alleged criticism of right-wing cabinet members, newspaper calls for his resignation and a poll showing a drop in support, reports PTI.

Major's authority has been weakened since the beginning of the year by a string of sex and financial scandals involving top Conservative politicians — all the more embarrassing coming just after he launched a key campaign for traditional values.

But Sunday's newspapers held little relief.

The tabloid People newspaper reported that another ruling Conservative member of parliament had fathered a

"love child", although Gary Waller's fall from grace was unlikely to cause the same reverberations as the resignation of a minister earlier this month for fathering a child in an adulterous affair.

The respected, Observer weekly newspaper called for the government to resign, saying the Conservatives had been in power for too long and had lost touch with the country. "For the good of the country, go," it said in an editorial.

The call was echoed by the left wing Sunday Mirror. "Major has lost the confidence of the country, his party and even his own constituents... there is an F-word that applies to Major. It describes his future. He is finished."

The tabloid was referring to

a controversy over remarks Major was alleged to have made at a private dinner party last week that he would "F... G crucially" right wing cabinet members.

Major, embroiled in controversy last year for allegedly referring to right-wingers as "bastards", was said to blame right wingers for hijacking his "back to basics" crusade for a return to old-style values and turning it into a moral crusade.

One cabinet minister present at the dinner, leader of the House of Commons Tony Newton, joined a chorus of denials. "This was a very pleas-

ing, nice occasion. I heard no such remarks. The PM (Prime Minister) says he made no such remarks."

But Sunday newspapers said the alleged remarks exposed deep divisions within the ruling party which are ripping it apart.

The Sunday Mirror also carried an opinion poll showing support for Major plummeting amongst his own constituents.

The audience selection poll found 51 per cent of his constituents in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, believed he had handled the recent spat

of scandals "very badly," compared with 37 per cent who said he had coped "well" or "very well."

The poll also found that 54 per cent believe Major does not demonstrate the leadership qualities needed in a Prime Minister, against 40 per cent who believe he does.

Following the resignation of junior Environment Minister Tim Yeo, another minister stepped down after the apparent suicide of his wife that the press linked to marital troubles, and a ministerial aide quit over a property deal.

But perhaps most damaging was a provisional official report last Thursday accusing the Conservative's flagship local council in Westminster in the heart of London of a multi-mil-

Off the Record

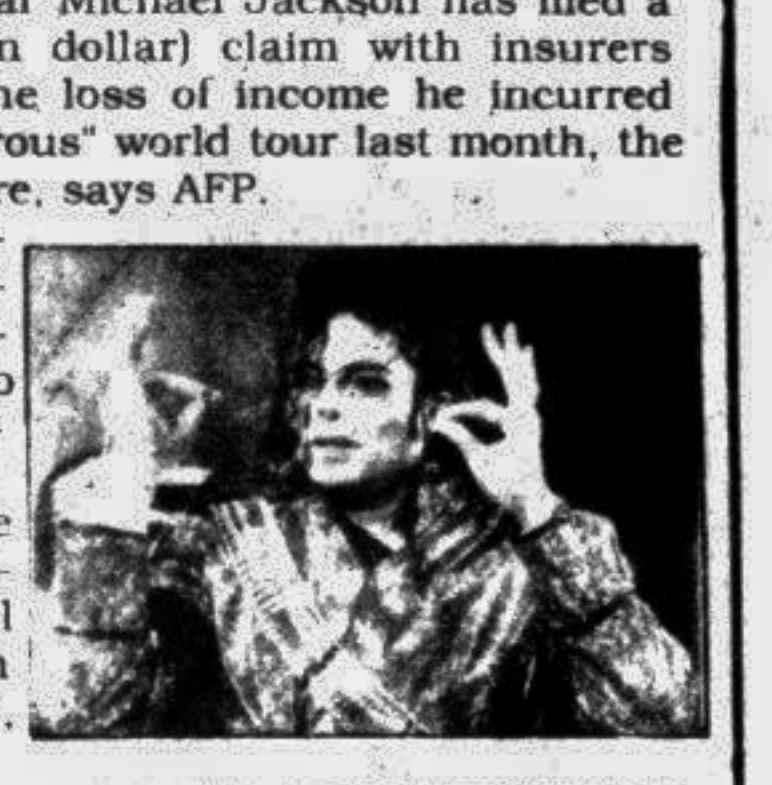
Jackson's suit to recover loss of income

LONDON: American pop star Michael Jackson has filed a 20 million pound (30 million dollar) claim with insurers Lloyd's of London to cover the loss of income he incurred when he cancelled his "Dangerous" world tour last month, the Sunday Telegraph reported here, says AFP.

Jackson, who faces a multi-million dollar lawsuit for a 13-year-old boy he allegedly molested, pulled out of the tour to seek treatment for an addiction to painkillers.

The tour promoters have also filed claims for compensation with Lloyd's whose total liability could reach 40 million pounds (60 million dollars), the paper said.

The German promoters Mama concerts and Marcel Avram, and their US counterparts pebbles music incorporated are also suing Jackson for 10 million dollars in compensation for the cancellation.



Belts to monitor health of unborn babies

NEW DELHI: Pregnant women might soon be able to wear electronic belts around their waists to monitor the health of their unborn babies a home-based alternative to conventional prenatal ultrasound scans, reports PTI.

A team of scientists in the United States has developed and successfully tested an electronic belt equipped with acoustic sensors that listen to the heart tone of the unborn baby and thereby determine the foetal heart rate.

The foetal heart rate serves as an effective diagnostic tool in several situations in which the unborn baby is under some kind of physical stress.

Although ultrasound scanning has emerged as a standard prenatal diagnostic procedure, it is relatively expensive and requires experts to operate the scanning equipment.

The belt will serve as a portable and easy-to-use device suitable for daily use by inexperienced pregnant women in their own homes, the four-member US team of electrical engineers and doctors said.

Clinton then returned to his hotel in the black limousine flown over from Washington for a week-long trip that has included stops in Brussels, Prague, Kiev, Moscow and Minsk.

The president ate "Choucroute", a traditional dish of hot cabbage and sausages, and drank local draught beer at the restaurant, according to staff who served his party of 10.

"They had a good time and laughed, a lot," said waitress Michele Blanc. "I wish that all of our guests, were as easy. He was rather timid. She, Hillary, has a lot of class."

Hillary and Chelsea sampled traditional Swiss cheese dishes, fondue and raclette (cheese melted over boiled potatoes, accompanied by thin, air-dried beef), and drank tea.

The whole family ordered ice cream desserts.

"Clinton was very nice and even relaxed," said waiter Pascal Engen.

Clinton dines at 'Les Armures'

GENEVA: President Bill Clinton spent the last night of his first European tour dining out with his family at a 17th-century restaurant in Geneva's old town, reports Reuter.

Clinton, on the eve of a meeting with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad on Sunday to discuss Middle East Peace, spent more than two hours in "Les Armures" (The Armourers) restaurant.

Dressed in a jacket and open-neck plaid shirt, Clinton emerged smiling from the restaurant, waving to a crowd of about 200 who braved the cold night for a glimpse of the president, his wife Hillary and daughter, Chelsea.



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Kuwait's Gulf War gift to Syria

DAMASCUS, Jan 16: The first of three Boeing aircraft offered to Syria by Kuwait as a reward for its help during the Gulf War, arrived on Saturday in Damascus, the Syrian news agency SANA said, reports AFP.

Aboard the Boeing-727 was the Director of Kuwait Airways, Ahmad Al-Zaban who was welcomed by Syrian Transport Minister Muftid Abdel Karim.

The gift illustrated "the brotherly relations" between the two countries and "Kuwait's gratitude for Syrian support for the emirate during its invasion by Iraq and for its role in Kuwait's liberation" in February 1991, Al-Zaban said.

Abdel Karim said the second Boeing would arrive on Monday and the third in a month's time after undergoing a refit.

SANA quoted Abdel Karim as saying Syria had signed an agreement with Kuwait Airways to form a joint air transport company.

Karens prefer talks outside Myanmar

BANGKOK, Jan 16: Karen ethnic minority rebels said today that talks with Myanmar's military rulers to end the 40-year revolt "could begin this month but should be held outside the country to safeguard their leaders, reports Reuter."

"Experience has told us that the peace talks should be held out of the country and we prefer that it be in Bangkok," Em Matha, spokesman for the Christian rebels, told Reuters by telephone.

"In the past we had three talks with the military junta in Yangon. The talks were held secretly but when the talks broke down our leaders were chased. They had to run for their lives," he said.

Once the venue was selected and security arrangements were made, the talks might start even before the end of this month, said the spokesman for the Karen National Union.

5000 Sudanese starve in Uganda

KAMPALA, Jan 16: About 5,000 Sudanese refugees are facing starvation at the Acholipit refugees camp in Kitgum district, northern Uganda, due to lack of food and medical supplies, the local daily "The New Vision" reported yesterday, says Xinhua.

The daily quoted a reliable source as saying supplies meant for the refugees had become a lucrative source of enrichment to officials of the World Food Programme, some transporters and officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

According to the paper, most of the refugees are women and children. They appeared malnourished and some others are suffering from diarrhoea and measles.

News Analysis

ferring to right-wingers as "bastards", was said to blame right wingers for hijacking his "back to basics" crusade for a return to old-style values and turning it into a moral crusade.

One cabinet minister present at the dinner, leader of the House of Commons Tony Newton, joined a chorus of denials. "This was a very pleas-