

Police officer shot dead in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, July 16: Suspected Kashmiri Muslim militants have shot dead a police officer tasked with arranging security for a Hindu pilgrimage that has been "banned" by a guerilla group, press reports said today, says Reuter.

The killing following state government assurances of tight security for the thousands of Hindus expected to travel next month to the holy Amarnath cave in the Kashmir mountains.

Police inspector Shyamal Pandita, a Hindu officer supervising security arrangements for the pilgrimage was shot dead Friday by gunmen as he emerged from his office in the South Kashmir town of Anantnag, The Pioneer said.

"The killing is being viewed as the first step towards sabotaging the yatra (pilgrimage)," the newspaper said in a dispatch from Srinagar, the Kashmir summer capital.

Harkat-ul-Ansar, a guerilla group which has many Islamic

mercenaries in its ranks, only 6 announced a "ban" on the pilgrimage to Amarnath, located some 15,000 feet (4,545 metres) above sea level.

Thousands of Hindus from all over India journey every year to the cave which they believe to be the abode of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, covering the last 25 kilometres (15 miles) of the pilgrimage on foot, or on ponies.

Harkat, whose members come from such countries as Sudan, Afghanistan and Pakistan, said it was imposing the "ban" to protest security deployment outside the Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar, Kashmir's holiest Islamic shrine.

The security pickets have been set up to prevent Muslim guerrillas, who are fighting for an end to Indian rule over Kashmir, from using the mosque as a sanctuary.

Pandita's murder followed assertions by the Kashmir state administration that it would ensure the safety of Hindu pilgrims, the Press Trust of India said.

China cancels meet with British minister

BEIJING, July 16: China cancelled a meeting Saturday between its top official for Hong Kong and a visiting British minister, signaling Beijing's continued anger at British democratic reforms in the colony, reports AP.

Alastair Goodlad, the highest British Foreign Office official to visit Beijing in a year marked by fierce disputes over Hong Kong, was to have met Lu Ping, director of China's Hong Kong and Macao Affairs Office.

But Goodlad, Britain's minister for Hong Kong affairs, said China indicated shortly before his arrival Thursday that the meeting was not possible. Goodlad said he did not know why. Hong Kong media said the meeting was scheduled for Saturday.

There were hopes before Goodlad's visit that China and Britain were shelving their argument over democracy in Hong Kong to focus instead on the colony's transfer from British to Chinese sovereignty in 1997.

But in a meeting Friday with Goodlad, Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen expressed doubt that their differences over Hong Kong's electoral system could be set aside, Hong Kong media reported.

Goodlad said he did not feel snubbed by China's decision to cancel his meeting with Lu, but it did appear to signal that Beijing remains angry over Hong Kong.

Goodlad also proposed that Qian meet his British counterpart Douglas Hurd, but was told that a meeting would only be possible in September at the United Nations General Assembly in New York, China's official Xinhua News Agency said.

China was infuriated when Chris Patten, the London appointed governor of Hong Kong, pushed ahead unilaterally with reforms to widen voting franchises in Hong Kong and model the colony's electoral system more closely on Britain's.

Hong Kong legislators passed

the reforms into law last month, provoking a renewed threat from China to void them in 1997.

Goodlad said he explained to Qian and to China's Vice Foreign Minister Jiag Enzhu "our hope that past differences with China over electoral questions could be put aside."

He said the Chinese officials undertook to consider his appeal.

Goodlad pointed to improving Anglo-Chinese trade as a sign that the two countries' relations are good despite the argument over Hong Kong. He said bilateral trade leapt 72 per cent in 1993 compared to 1992, and was up nearly 40 per cent in the first four months this year against the same period in 1993.

Goodlad said he also hoped Britain and China would soon sign a 55 million pounds sterling (86 million dollar) loan for British business projects in China.

"As far as we are concerned China is a very valued friend," he said.

One arrested in China's biggest bribery case

BEIJING, July 16: Authorities have arrested a former government official who is suspected of taking more than one million dollars in China's biggest bribery case, an official newspaper said Saturday, reports AP.

Wang Jianye, the former director of finance and trade for the Planning Bureau in Shenzhen city, south China, fled the country last July to escape investigation but was later repatriated with the help of Interpol, the China Daily said.

It said Wang allegedly took 4.8 million yuan (551,000 dollar) and 750,000 dollar in exchange for delivering duty-free steel, crude oil and plywood, as well as foreign currency quotas, to companies in Shenzhen.

The newspaper said it was thought to be China's biggest-ever bribery case.

Bribery, favoritism, and other forms of corruption have become rampant under the government's economic reforms.

Off the Record



Karen Humphries holding her daughter Abbie before the baby was abducted at Nottingham's Queen's Medical Centre. Missing baby, Abbie, snatched only four hours after her birth, was reunited with her family yesterday after police found the infant in a house barely a mile from where she was kidnapped. — AFP photo

Mother agrees to sell daughter to bail boyfriend out of jail

VERO BEACH: A 23-year-old woman was in prison Friday after she agreed to sell her young daughter to raise money to bail her boyfriend out of jail, police said, reports Reuter.

Debra Kay Powell was arrested Thursday night after she arranged to sell her 2½-year-old daughter, Ashley, to the owner of a local day care centre for 10,000 dollars.

Powell, who is unemployed, said she needed the money to free her boyfriend and for her own personal use. Police could not say whether the boyfriend was the child's father or whether he knew of Powell's scheme.

Karen Grayan, owner of Karen Corner's Child Care, contacted police after Powell approached her last month with the offer to sell her child. She allowed police to video and audiotape the transaction in which Powell delivered Ashley to her home, took the money, and left.

Powell was arrested and taken to Indian river county jail, and Ashley was turned over to her grandparents.

Swallows commit suicide

BEIJING: Two swallows, griefstricken after their nest was repeatedly destroyed by a villager in northeast China, killed themselves by flying into the house door, the official China Daily said Saturday, reports Reuter.

It said the swallows found their nest in the eaves of a home in Mudanjing city in Heilongjiang province destroyed after returning from their annual migration.

They built a new nest, but the home owner destroyed it also.

"The house owner destroyed their home again and again five times," the newspaper said. "In extreme despair, the swallows killed themselves by knocking their heads against the door."

Mother's sacrifice

TRENTON: Caught in currents after accidentally driving into a rain-swollen lake, Victoria Hoffman struggled to keep her head above water while clutching her 7-year-old son, reports AP.

In heavy rain and growing darkness Thursday night, Hoffman screamed for help. Minutes later, she shoved her son toward a rescuer before she was suddenly pulled under water to her death.

"I hollered 'Can you swim?' and she said 'yes,' but that she couldn't because she was holding onto the boy," said Mike Minyon, who helped grab the boy, Gregory, and drag him ashore.

"That was the last I saw her."

Hoffman's body was discovered about three hours later. With the thunderstorm apparently hampering her vision, Hoffman drove past a "no-outlet" sign about a mile (two kms) from her Audubon home in suburban Philadelphia and into Crystal Lake, which was an estimated 15 feet (five meters) deep, said Haddon Township police Detective Joseph Kite. The lake usually is no deeper than 4 feet (about a meter deep).

"There was nothing to stop her," Kite said. "The lake had overrun its banks and the curb was covered. She went right over the curb and then the current swept them in."

At least 6½ inches (16 centimeters) of rainfall in the area in the two hours before Hoffman drowned, the National Weather Service said.

BRIEFLY

Nepali prince invited to India: Nepal Crown Prince Dipendra has been invited to pay an official visit to India by Indian Vice President K R Narayanan at a mutually convenient time, Xinhua reports from Kathmandu.

According to the Principal Press Secretariat of the King, the invitation was conveyed to the Prince by Indian ambassador Bimal Prasad and the date for the visit will be worked out through diplomatic channels, local press reported on Saturday.

5 Egyptian militants to die: An Egyptian military court condemned five Muslim militants to death yesterday for trying to blow up Interior Minister Hassan Al-Ali last year, security sources said, Reuter reports from Cairo.

It jailed 10 for related charges and arms possession and acquitted two men. Military intelligence officials, who had the five condemned men in custody, barred foreign correspondents from attending the court.

US ship arrives at base in Japan: The aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk arrived at the US navy base at Sasebo in southwestern Japan yesterday bringing the number of US carrier battle groups in the Far East to two, Reuter reports from Tokyo.

Kyodo news agency said Kitty Hawk was scheduled to hold joint exercises with the Japanese navy in the east China Sea starting July 19, the first time a US carrier group will be in the area between China, Korea and Japan since 1988 during the Seoul Olympics.

Murayama to visit Vietnam: Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama plans to visit Vietnam and some of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members in late August. The Tokyo Shimbun Daily said yesterday, AFP reports from Tokyo.

Murayama will be the first Japanese Prime Minister to visit Vietnam since 1967 when then Prime Minister Eisaku Sato went to Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City.

Attack on Mexican diplomats: Three Mexican diplomats and their Guatemalan driver were wounded by unknown gunmen in an attack while driving in central Guatemala City, Friday, said municipal firemen, Reuter reports from Guatemala City.

The attack occurred shortly after noon in one of the Guatemalan capital's most exclusive neighbourhoods, said Fire Department spokesman Luis Oseguea.

The victims were taken to hospital with gunshot wounds, but were in stable condition he told Reuters. A spokesman for the Mexican Embassy in Guatemala City said the diplomats all worked in the embassy's legal department.

47 drug ring men held in China: Chinese police have seized 20 grams (0.7 ounces) of heroin and detained 47 members of a drug ring in the southern Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen. The China Daily reported yesterday, AFP says from Beijing.

Police raided a large rented house in the village of Ruohu near Shenzhen before dawn on Wednesday, following a tip-off that this was the gang's base for prostitution activities and looting raids, the reports said.

Twenty of the gang members are to be sent to drug rehabilitation centres while the remainder have been charged with other crimes and are being detained for interrogation, it said. The gang originated in Pingziang in southeastern Jiangxi Province.

Storms claim 41 in China: At least 41 people were killed and another 230 people seriously injured in the latest series of violent storms in China, a report said on Saturday, AFP says from Hong Kong.

Some 3,400 families were left homeless by a destructive storm that swept through southeastern Hubei province from Monday to Wednesday, the Ta Kung Pao newspaper said in a report.

Ouellet starts Asia tour July 18: Canadian Foreign Minister Andre Ouellet leaves for a tour of Asia this month in a major Canadian initiative to improve relations with the Asia Pacific rim region, AFP reports from Ottawa.

The foreign minister's visit will be followed up in November with a tour to China, Hong Kong, Indonesia and possibly one other country by Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

Ouellet is to visit Japan July 18-21, South Korea July 21-24, Thailand July 25-27, China July 28-31 and Hong Kong August 1-2.



The new president of the European Commission, Luxembourg's Premier Jacques Santer (R) gestures during a press conference after being elected head of the EU's executive by European leaders during an extraordinary summit on Friday in Brussels. German Chancellor and current president of the European Council, Helmut Kohl (C), and outgoing commission president Jacques Delors of France (L), look on. — AFP photo

India blames Pakistan for sabotaging talks

NEW DELHI, July 16: India accused Pakistan Friday of sabotaging a resumption of high-level bilateral talks by setting "impossible preconditions," reports AP.

Indian Foreign Secretary Kris Srinivasan told reporters that Pakistan's attitude made it unrealistic to expect an early meeting with his Pakistani counterpart.

"By setting impossible preconditions for dialogue, one has to conclude that the other party is not interested in a dialogue," he said.

The Foreign Secretary did not detail the Pakistani preconditions which he said were blocking a resumption of talks, but Pakistan has insisted previously on linking the Kashmir

dispute with any further discussions.

Since 1989, nearly 10,000 people have died in a Muslim separatist rebellion against Indian rule in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-Majority state.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training the Muslim militants and has rejected demands to hold a referendum in the Himalayan state to allow Kashmiris to decide their future.

Srinivasan's predecessor, J N Dixit, met with his Pakistani counterpart Shaharyar Mohammed Khan in Islamabad on January 1 but the discussions failed to break any new ground between the traditional Asian rivals.

Srinivasan said India was

hopeful that Pakistan would respond positively to an Indian proposal that the two nations review the implementation of the code of conduct for diplomats.

The Iranian Embassy denied the charges against the four mid-ranking envoys but said they would leave on Monday.

Venezuelan Foreign Ministry officials said the diplomats were asked to leave after attempting on Thursday to capture a former Iranian government official and his family.

"They acted against the law in trying to detain this man and his family, who have been in various countries since leaving Iran and now hope for refuge here," a Foreign Ministry spokesman told Reuters, without giving more details of the incident.

No US decision yet to invade Haiti

WASHINGTON, July 16: Secretary of State Warren Christopher insisted Friday that the United States has so far made no decision to invade Haiti despite growing speculation it would ultimately have to remove the country's rulers by force, reports Reuter.

Christopher told a White House news conference that Haiti's illegal government should leave office "right now" but added: "The president has made no decision with respect to the use of military force, and there's no deadline."

The United States has vowed to end the rule of what it calls Haiti's de facto military regime and reinstate democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who

was ousted in a 1991 coup.

A message to the Haitian people from Aristide, who lives in exile in Washington, was to be broadcast Friday from US airplanes that will become a flying radio station called "radio democracy."

Washington has led an effort to impose increasingly tough sanctions on Haiti and in recent weeks US officials have spoken often of the possibility of military intervention.

A barrage of threats and tirades from Washington against the Haitian rulers intensified this week after they expelled some 100 human rights monitors from the country.

In a fresh blast Friday, Samuel Berger, President Clinton's deputy assistant na-

tional security adviser, called what was happening in Haiti an affront to decency.

"You have a military leadership there which first stole the democracy that had been established in Haiti, swept away the elections and now is ruling that country through what is really a reign of terror — murders, killings, kidnappings, a mutilation — the situation continues to deteriorate," he said in an ABC television interview.

Randall Robinson, head of the lobbying group TransAfrica, said Clinton had run out of choices and would eventually have to use force. "You will see an intervention perhaps within a month," he said on Cable News Network television.

But US policy makers on

Haiti have stressed that they think sanctions and diplomatic pressures should run their course before any military move. The idea of invading Haiti has also left Congress members of both parties uneasy.

Lee Hamilton, Democratic chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement Friday that he thought the likelihood of an invasion was increasing but that current policy should be given more time to work.

"The sanctions and the latest refugee policy have only been in place a short time. Diplomatic avenues also should be aggressively pursued to reach a peaceful settlement," he said.

UNITA captures Belize

BRAZZAVILLE, July 16: Angola's rebel UNITA movement has taken control of Belize in the northern oil-producing Cabinda enclave after fierce fighting with government troops, an aid official said on Friday here in neighbouring Congo, reports AP.

The fighting left seven soldiers dead and several UNITA fighters wounded, according to the official of the non-governmental humanitarian group in Cabinda assistance promotion based in Pointe-Noire near the Cabinda border.

The town's capture earlier this week was "an important victory for UNITA" because of the city's accessible airport and gold deposits, he added.

The Angolan Defence Minister, Pedro Maria Tonha,

told journalists in Cabinda city on Friday that government forces had clashed with the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and local Flec separatists in the region recently, but could not confirm the outcome of the fighting.

On Thursday army officials said they had lost contact with troops engaged at Belize, but reinforcements from Luanda could be seen in the enclave.

Tonha was among Angolan government officials due to meet in Cabinda on Friday with Zairean counterparts for talks on improving bilateral relations and improving security on their joint border. Luanda is keen to stop all Zairean aid to the UNITA rebels.

Malaysia to ban teachings of Al-Arqam

KUALA LUMPUR, July 16: Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said today that the religious teachings of a radical Islamic sect, Al-Arqam, would be banned in his country, reports Reuter.

The Malaysian government's stance on the group was that the movement had deviated from Islamic teachings and we have to prevent the spread of Arqam's teachings," the national Bernama news agency quoted him as saying.

Mahathir said the situation had reached a stage where the peace and security of Malaysia was in danger as Al-Arqam's teachings may split the Muslims in the country.

Kim's death changes Korea's political, emotional landscape

SEOUL, July 16: Like the border that divides the two Koreas, the events of a muggy midsummer's day now form a deep demarcation in the psyche of a troubled peninsula, reports AP.

The hot, sticky afternoon of July 9 brought electrifying news: Kim Il-Sung, the only leader of the communist North had ever known, was dead.

North and South alike suddenly saw their world in dramatic new terms. Before and after. Then and now.

"Everything has changed," said political scientist Lee Jong-seok.

The week since word of Kim's death has been a wild roller coaster ride for the South. First came fear over the possibility of a power struggle in the North in the wake of

Kim's death.

Less than an hour after death was announced, the South's military went on high alert. Top officials met in emergency sessions. On Seoul's stony back streets and broad boulevards, strangers clasped one another in shock.

As the days passed, clues emerged from the secretive North as to the shape of the new political hierarchy. The South was relieved by signs that Kim's son and handpicked heir, 52-year-old Kim Jong-Il, was cementing his control.

But week's end brought a new outbreak of nervousness over indications a behind-the-scenes struggle might be occurring after all. On Saturday, the day before Kim's elaborate state funeral was to have taken place, the North

abruptly postponed the event for two days.

That surprise move came amid signs that the younger Kim was purging political rivals — including his stepmother, who was edited out of official TV footage from the North.

Through the week's ups and downs, it stayed quiet on the northern front — the tense demilitarized zone dividing the two Koreas.

The South reported no unusual military movements along the border, and six days after the death, it eased its high state of alert.

While the two sides' militaries kept wary watch, the week's key battle raged elsewhere. In the North, Kim's death set off an all-out propaganda war.

Day after day, the North's

official media hammered away at one theme: transforming grief for the elder Kim, who had ruled for 46 years, into loyalty to his son.

"Overwhelmed by sorrow... mourners vowed to triumphantly advance our revolution, united ever closer around Comrade Kim Jong-Il," said a typical dispatch four days after the father's death.

But rallying real support for the younger Kim remained a formidable task. He is universally acknowledged to lack Kim Il-Sung's charisma, and reports of his erratic personality have worried some Western observers.

Officials in the South expressed confidence that a North Korea under Kim Jong-Il would make no drastic changes in foreign policy, and

continue the conciliatory tack it had taken in the weeks before Kim's death.

In a hard-line Stalinist state like the North, eleven-hour changes in such a highly orchestrated event are extremely rare, and Southern officials were anxiously monitoring developments.

For ordinary citizens in the North, life can't move on until after the funeral is over. Paying tribute is a public duty from which few in the North are exempt. By the tens of thousands, mourners wept on their knees before statues of Kim and filed past the body of the "Great Leader," reposed in a flower-bedecked casket in the presidential palace.

Once the funeral is over, events could move swiftly. Assuming he has in fact

prevailed against his rivals, Kim Jong-Il could be formally invested with power soon, possibly within days.

Then the Korea's, temporarily united by their mutual obsession with Kim Il-Sung's death, can turn their attention back to their separate problems.

The South has labour disputes, allegations of political corruption and student unrest to deal with.

The North needs to repair its economy and resolve the nuclear dispute. The latter could be a key to the former.

If the North agrees to freeze what is widely thought to be a nuclear weapons programme, it could anticipate a badly needed influx of aid and an opportunity to open normal trade links.

Demonstration against Armenian president

YEREVAN, July 16: Some 50,000 opposition protesters gathered in central Yerevan to denounce Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian and the government who they accused of being authoritarian and amoral, reports AP.

The demonstration was organised by the opposition, Movement National Democratic Union, whose members accused government ministers of being "prostitutes" and who said they would throw out the government in elections next year.

"This state does not belong to a single man," said Vasgen Manukian, a leader of the Movement. "We will not let [Ter-Petrosian] destroy our country."