

Snipers enforce strike in Karachi: 4 die

KARACHI, Nov 12: Snipers on rooftops enforced a strike that shut down Pakistan's largest city today. Police said four people were killed as sporadic gunfire kept most people indoors, reports AP.

Businesses were shuttered and only the occasional car was seen on the usually congested streets of Karachi. The strike was called by a militant ethnic group to protest the killing of its leader two days earlier.

"There is no safety here," said Shakur Ahmed, a store owner. "It's better to close your shop. Who can protect us?"

Gunfire was heard in Karachi's troubled eastern and central districts. The four people who died either were caught in the cross-fire or shot by

police, said Police Inspector Sarfraz Khan, without elaborating.

Snipers on rooftops made sure few people left their homes.

Karachi, a teeming port city, has become increasingly chaotic and violent in recent months. Gunfights between political and sectarian groups and the security forces have become an almost daily occurrence.

The most recent trouble began late Thursday when Mansoor Ahmed Khan, deputy general of the opposition Mohajir Qumi Movement, was gunned down. His death sparked dozens of gunbattles that left 17 dead and 50 other people wounded.

8 militants, 4 soldiers killed in Kashmir battle

JAMMU, Nov 12: Eight militants and four soldiers were killed in a six-hour battle in an area of southern Kashmir that had been largely free of major violence during a bloody five-year revolt, Indian police said today, reports Reuters.

A group of about 25 militants fighting Indian rule of the Himalayan region ambushed an army patrol at the village of Sumbur, 160 km (100 miles) east of Jammu, winter capital of India's Jammu and Kashmir state, police said.

Four soldiers were killed in the ambush late on Friday and reinforcements were rushed to cut off the militants. Eight

militants were killed in the ensuing gun battle, police said. Doda district, where Sumbur lies, has seen more militant activity in recent months but nothing on the scale of the bloodshed in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir valley to the north.

Police said the clash was the most intense in Doda district for months.

AFP adds: Muslim militants hiding in dense forests of the mountainous region pounded an army patrol with rockets and heavy gunfire, a police spokesman said, adding that the attackers escaped.

The area is a known stronghold of Afghan guerillas who support the Muslim militants' bloody, five-year-old campaign for Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, to secede.

Four men from the paramilitary Border Security Force (BSF) were critically wounded when a BSF patrol at Lal Bazar, in the heart of Srinagar, police said.

The attack, also late Friday, came amid escalated fighting between Muslim separatists and Indian security forces throughout the Kashmir Valley and nearby Doda district, police sources said here.

Militants freely fired rockets and two-inch mortars and lobbed countless grenades at security forces and their pickets across the valley, including this heavily populated city. The fighting lasted until dawn today.

Kashmiri militants are fighting largely Hindu India either to join the region to Muslim Pakistan, which controls one-third of the territory, or for a re-union and in dependent Kashmir.

Police and hospitals in Srinagar, the state's summer capital, have reported more than 17,000 deaths in the revolt.

India needs multi-role planes: Marshal Kaul

NEW DELHI, Nov 12: India's air force chief was quoted today as saying the country needs multi-role aircraft in order to increase firepower while reducing costs, reports Reuters.

"There is need to have more multi-role aircraft with advanced technologies so that more punch is available with less force levels," air chief Marshal S.K. Kaul told the Asian Age newspaper in an interview.

Kaul said the Indian air force needed such planes because it could not afford the number of aircraft it currently has.

"As a yardstick, I will like to have one third of my total aircraft to be multi-role in performance," he said.

Kaul said the British Tor-

nadoes and French Mirage planes came under that category, but did not say when a decision would be made on whether to buy the planes or which would be purchased if the government provided the money.

"They have already offered their Mirage-200 5D to us, which has an improved radar and better engine performance. One problem is its cost at nearly 45 million dollars a piece," the air chief said.

Kaul expected the number of squadrons to be reduced by at least five by 2005.

"The present 39-1/2 squadrons will be unviable by then considering that by 1996 the Hunters and Canberras would be phased out of service. There will also be aircraft depletions in the Mig series," he said.

BRIEFLY

Chinese journalist jailed: A respected Chinese journalist, Gao Yu, has been sentenced to a secret trial to six years in prison for "leaking state secrets," a human rights group said Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

Gao, 50, has been in detention since her arrest on October 2, 1993, just two days before she was to leave China to take up a position as a visiting scholar at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

ROK welcomes IAEA decision: South Korea on Saturday welcomed the international nuclear watchdog agency's decision to conduct on-site inspections to verify that North Korea has frozen its nuclear programme, AP reports from Seoul.

Without setting a timeframe, the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called Friday for the checks as a follow-up to the October 21 US-North Korea agreement, which opened a path for clearing the Communist country from suspicions of making nuclear weapons.

Thai army chief blasts Canberra: The Thai army chief has said Australians killed in Cambodia were spies and that Canberra was trying to make the Thai military a scapegoat by accusing it of helping the Khmer Rouge, news reports said yesterday, AFP reports from Bangkok.

"Why don't you find out why these Australians were killed in Cambodia?" General Wimol Wongwanich was quoted as telling local reporters. "They were killed because they got involved in espionage activities."

8 executed in China: Eight people have been executed for stealing from railroads, an official report said on Saturday, AP reports from Beijing.

The eight, including two identified as Yang Huaxing and Wu Honghua, were convicted of stealing freight from railroads valued at more than 460,000 yuan (54,000 dollars) the newspaper Legal Daily said. All eight were executed in Nanchang, in southeastern Jiangxi province, it said.

Floods claim 100 in Somalia: Floods in southern Somalia have killed more than 100 people, Somali radio reported on Friday, Reuters reports from London. The radio quoted a statement by the Somali National Alliance led by warlord Mohamed Siad Barre as saying the Shabelle and Juba rivers had burst their banks because of rain. A moving sea had cut off several large areas for more than a week, the radio monitored by the BBC in London said. The alliance appealed to the international community for help.

14 die in Patna road mishap: At least 14 persons were killed and several others injured when a minibus carrying them swerved off the road and overturned at a place under Masaurhi sub-division in Patna district on Friday night, PTI reports from Patna.

Official sources said yesterday that the ill-fated vehicle was on its way to Masaurhi from Patna. The injured have been admitted to different hospitals.

Bank dacoity in Cambodia: Six men, four of them in police and military uniforms, have robbed a Thai bank of 700,000 dollar in broad daylight, a newspaper reported Saturday, AP says from Phnom Penh.

Interior Minister You Kokry said police had some clues and were hoping to arrest the robbers. The Cambodian language Chakravala newspaper said a jeep carrying the money from the Krung Thai Bank was stopped as it was approaching the Phnom Penh airport Friday by armed men.

3 shot dead in Egypt: Gunmen thought to be Muslim militants killed three people and wounded two in two incidents in southern Egypt on Friday, security sources said, Reuters reports from Assiut, Egypt.

In the village of Al-Mahris near the town of Maliwal, gunmen shot dead two civilians, apparently in the belief that they were collaborating with the police, they said. In a separate attack on a police patrol at Al-Usayrat, in the province of Qena farther south, they shot dead one policeman and wounded another, the sources said.

30 rebels killed in Peru: Guerillas bombed targets in Lima for a second straight day, and the military said it killed 30 Shining Path rebels in the Andean highlands, AP reports from Lima.

Bombs exploded at two branch offices of the Banco de Credito, the country's largest bank, causing damage but wounding no one, police said. Dynamite was thrown at the bank offices in the working-class districts of La Victoria and Brena — one at 5 am and the other around midnight Thursday, police said.

Violent kid's series censored: A TV network criticized for broadcasting the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers has decided to leave the most violent scenes on the cutting room floor, AP reports from Toronto. Episodes of the children's adventure series edited to comply with voluntary anti-violence regulations will begin airing on the CapWest Global network November 21, said David Hamilton, a network spokesman.

UN to withdraw from Mozambique

UNITED NATIONS, Nov 12: The United Nations will begin withdrawing its 5,500 man force from Mozambique following final election returns next week, UN secretary-general said Friday, reports AP.

The mission, which involves 5,558 peacekeepers, civilians police and military observers, is expected to wrap-up by mid-December, according to UN officials. However, a delegation will remain to help rebuild the nation torn by 15 years of war.

The announcement follows the successful completion of elections and the successful completion of the UN mission.

Recent wave of suicides in US forces concerns Pentagon

WASHINGTON, Nov 12: Some 200 US soldiers commit suicide each year in the United States, but a recent wave of suicides in the marine corps has forced defence officials to take a hard look at the mental health of its 1.5 million troops, reports AP.

The suicide rate in the US military is slightly higher than that of the civilian population, which averages about 14 out of every 100,000 people.

But the Pentagon acknowledges that its troops constitute a "vulnerable population" and one official underlined that fact by describing 18-year-old marine recruits as a "very young, volatile group with guns in their hands."

"We are very concerned specifically given the very vulnerable population we deal with," commented one defence official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Three marines shot and killed themselves while serving in Haiti in September and October, prompting defence officials to send a team of psychiatrists and psychologists to the Caribbean country to help servicemen deal with stress.

Recently a military instructor who was leading exercises conducted in a pool asked the 60 soldiers present to face the other way while he stood on

the diving board and shot himself.

Psychological counseling was offered to each of the soldiers following the incident and all of them accepted the service in what officials said was a telling fact on the difficulty of dealing with suicide in the army ranks.

The Pentagon attributes army suicides to three reasons: The psychologically difficult nature of military operations, the length of the missions and the poor living conditions.

Service in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, such as those carried out in Somalia, Haiti and Rwanda, has

been pinpointed as particularly stressful for servicemen who must observe strict rules of engagement.

"They are trained to fight and they are there observing conditions they feel they cannot act on," a defence official said.

Overall, some two-thirds of all suicides — among servicemen as well as civilians — can be attributed to emotional problems stemming from a troubled relationship.

Defence officials say that the distance separating servicemen from their families and friends contributes to the emergence of such problems.



Several hundred Muslims march to a police station in Bombay on Friday to protest a police order demanding proof of Indian citizenship to be listed as voters for the state assembly polls in February. — AFP photo

Timorese students invade US embassy in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Nov 12: Banner-waving East Timorese students invaded the U.S. embassy compound in Jakarta today to demand President Bill Clinton's support to free a jailed guerrilla leader, reports Reuters.

U.S. officials told them to leave, but they vowed to stay until their demands were met. Twenty-nine young men seeking the release of guerrilla chief Xanana Gusmao clambered over a 2.6 metre (8-ft) railing into an embassy parking lot, where they squatted nervously on the concrete saying they would go on hunger strike until they met U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

"America is the only super power in the world. We think the Americans can use their influence to save the situation in East Timor," one demonstrator shouted.

Christopher is here for ministerial meetings to prepare for a summit of the 18-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum next week. Clinton himself arrives on Sunday.

Embassy officials at first said the students could stay, as long as they wished, but three hours later ordered them out

by the end of the day. "We will escort you to the front gate but you must leave today," Security Chief Bruce Tully said.

Christopher, who pledged to raise concerns about East

BBC apologises to Queen Mother

LONDON, Nov 12: The BBC has apologised to Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother for reporting she died, reports AP.

Buckingham Palace and Clarence House, the Queen Mother's official residence, were swamped with calls when the BBC's Ceefax television information service reported on Friday that the 94-year-old mother of Queen Elizabeth II had died.

The announcement, part of a BBC rehearsal script for the real event, was transmitted briefly by mistake.

"One line from a rehearsal script was on screen for literally a few seconds," said a BBC spokesman, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

He said the BBC has sent the Queen Mother a written apology.

Timor with Indonesian authorities, said the United States would not move forcefully against the protesters.

"We have no plans to throw them out," he told reporters before rushing to Manila to link up with Clinton. "We are dealing with the situation with sympathy and understanding, as well as firmness."

He said the United States was seeking assurances from the Indonesian government about treatment of the protesters "when and if they leave."

The students — including one who had scaled the iron spikes in full view of police to join the initial wave of 28 — gave no sign they would back down.

"We will not leave until our demands are met," one told reporters through the railings. Several hundred police, some with automatic weapons, took up positions outside the compound.

The demonstration was a major embarrassment for 73-year-old President Suharto as he prepared to welcome leaders representing half of the world's population.

Bandaranaike to be PM, confirms Kumaratunga

COLOMBO, Nov 12: President Chandrika Kumaratunga announced today she will appoint her mother, Sirima Bandaranaike, as the new prime minister in a cabinet to be announced Sunday, reports AP.

The 78-year-old Bandaranaike, a senior minister without portfolio, held the prime minister's post from 1960 to 1965 and from 1970 to 1977.

"I have proposed and agreed to it," Kumaratunga told reporters when asked to confirm reports that a mother-daughter team would rule the country. "Why do you think it is nepotism?" she said.

Bandaranaike became the world's first elected woman prime minister when she headed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party's (SLFP) victory after the assassination of her prime minister husband, Solomon Bandaranaike.

Haitian students ransack edn ministry

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, Nov 12: About 2,000 students who failed their high school exams ransacked the education ministry, smashing windows, breaking furniture and trying to force their way into the minister's office, reports AP.

Police didn't show up until hours after the disturbance on Friday, underscoring the lack of security in Haiti despite the presence of thousands of US troops.

With the fall of the military regime, Haiti has been left without an effective police force. And the American soldiers are unwilling to act as Haiti's policemen.

Criminals apparently are taking advantage of the political turmoil.

Two Haitian employees of the US embassy were killed on Thursday and a third was wounded while picking up the embassy payroll from a local bank.

Earlier in the week, there was a rash of robberies and burglaries in the city. At night, gunfire is often heard in poor neighbourhoods.

US forces arrived in Haiti in September to restore the elected government of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Off the Record

'No boyfriends' rule for royal stand-in mum

LONDON: A woman branded a "surrogate mum" for Princess Diana's two sons when they are with their father Prince Charles has agreed to a "no boyfriends" rule imposed by Buckingham Palace, a British newspaper said on Saturday, reports Reuters.

A book claimed last week that Diana was enraged to learn her estranged husband's aide, Tiggy Legge-Bourke, was spending more and more time with princes William 12, and Harry 10, and even referred to them as her "babies".

The Daily Mirror said a palace official had told the 29-year-old woman that her job as a stand-in mother meant she could have no boyfriends in tow, and she agreed.

The paper said she had also given up her own flat to spend more time with the princes.

Triplets born to 50-year-old

GLENDALE, California: At an age when many women become grandmothers, 50-year-old Millie Olvare is just getting started on parenting triplets she conceived through in-vitro fertilisation, reports AP.

Olvare gave birth prematurely on Thursday to Alexander, Veronica and Stephanie. The triplets together weigh less than 7 pounds (3.17 kg), but doctors expect them to be healthy.

Olvare became pregnant last May through in-vitro after 16 years of surgeries and a number of other methods commonly used for inducing pregnancy. She and her husband had been trying to conceive for another 10 years before then.

Dr Ronald Wu, Olvare's doctor, said it's uncommon for women in their 50s to be able to become pregnant. Those who do often deliver prematurely, he said.

Olvare surprised doctors again when she did not need a Caesarean section delivery, Wu said.

Olvare and her husband, Florante, expect to take their babies home from the Glendale Adventist Medical Centre by early January. The triplets are being kept in warmers in the neo-natal intensive care unit.

Shortest-ever marriage

BONN: Germany's shortest-ever marriage has ended after just 17 and a half hours, Bild newspaper reported on Friday, says AP.

That was the time it took hairdresser Katrin, 25, and publisher Hans-Werner, 33, to go from the registry office to a divorce lawyer, the paper said. Fists began to fly as soon as their wedding night had begun.

Alleged rapist castrated

NEW DELHI: A ruling Congress Party activist was castrated by police in the Marxist-governed state of West Bengal for supposedly raping a communist worker's daughter. The Telegraph daily said on Friday, reports AP.

Rash Behari Karmakar, 41, was whisked away by police from a hospital in Burdwan town where he had been admitted for spinal injuries, and emasculated for allegedly raping the 15-year-old girl, it said.

The victim said local police officer Tapan Choubey carried out an arrest on October 24, after a complaint was filed by the girl's father. Karmakar quoted the officer as saying his penis would be "chopped off".

"They searched me and took away all my belongings, including three rings with precious stones," Karmakar said. "I was kicked in the abdomen for an hour and then locked up."

"The next morning, I found myself in the same (hospital) ward and the doctor asked me, 'Who has done this to you?'" Karmakar said. "He said I had been castrated."

China to build 2 more nuclear plants

BEIJING, Nov 12: China will build two more nuclear power plants in the country's south-east with a total generating capacity of 100 megawatts to meet rapidly rising demand, the official People's Daily said today, reports Reuters.

One plant would be at Sanmen Bay in Zhejiang province, to the south of Shanghai, and the second at Lianyung Port in Jiangsu province, which lies north of Shanghai, the newspaper said.

The combined generating capacity of the two plants to be included in the 1996-2000 five-year plan would be 100 megawatts, it said. Firms from the United States and Canada

have expressed interest in building the plants, it said.

The plants will provide power to Shanghai and surrounding provinces, where demand for electricity is growing at more than 10 per cent a year with power consumption expected to reach 275 billion kilowatts by the year 2000, it said.

China has begun construction of two new 600 megawatt reactors at its 300 megawatt home-designed nuclear station at Qinshan in Zhejiang.

China's only other commercial nuclear power plant, built at Daya Bay near Hong Kong, has two 900 megawatt French-designed reactors in operation.

China to use force in Taiwan if necessary

JAKARTA, Nov 12: China will not invade Taiwan but could turn to the military option if Taipei, declares independence from the mainland, Foreign Minister Qian Qichen reaffirmed today, reports AP.

Speaking at a news conference here with other foreign and trade ministers of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, Qian said the military option might also be used if foreign forces took control of Taiwan.

"Militarily we will not invade Taiwan."



WORLD RECORD FOR BEAUTIES: All 87 of the Miss World contestants assemble for the team photograph in Sun City on Friday before the pageant on November 19. — AFP photo