

International

Seven more killed in Karachi violence

KARACHI, Dec 22: Seven more people were reported killed today in this southern Pakistani port city plagued by political and sectarian unrest, police and hospital sources said. reports AFP.

Police recovered four bodies riddled with bullets from an orchard in the eastern Malir district. The bodies were dumped after an early morning shooting incident by unidentified gunmen, they said.

A youth was shot dead near the city's railway station, while two more bodies were brought to hospital earlier. One of the victims was identified as an off-duty soldier killed in sniper fire elsewhere in the city, police said.

President Farooq Ahmed Leghari is scheduled to arrive here today for talks with various political, religious and

ethnic party leaders to restore normality.

Press reports said the death toll in the past three weeks of trouble was close to 150.

Nearly 700 people have died this year in clashes between rival factions of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), which represents Urdu-speaking settlers, militants belonging to the minority Shi'i community's Tehreek-i-Jaferia Pakistan (TJP), and a Sunni Muslim party, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP).

The high death toll this month was attributed as a new wave of killing by unidentified figures who spray bullets from and escape in speeding vehicles.

Several government and opposition leaders have blamed unidentified foreign hands in the unrest.

Russian jets pound Grozny in heaviest bombardment yet

GROZNY, Russia, Dec 22: Russian jets unleashed their heaviest bombardment yet on the capital of rebel Chechnya early on Thursday, but their hit-and-run tactics seemed to strengthen the resolve of Grozny's remaining residents, reports AP.

It was the third consecutive day of overnight air raids on Grozny — Moscow's new strategy with its ground troops bogged down by unexpected resistance. Chechen spokesmen claimed scores of civilians were killed the previous two nights.

In a further sign of Russian resolve, Moscow reportedly has sent two battalions of up to 400 marines apiece to the elite Taman Division to bolster its forces in Chechnya. The Taman Division attacked the

Russian White House in October 1993 on President Boris Yeltsin's orders.

Heavy shelling resumed close to Grozny on Thursday morning. Three large bomb craters scarred a field in a northern suburb, destroying several shop fronts, smashing all surrounding windows and blackening the snow-covered ground for metres around.

A nine-story apartment building was hit on the roof, and three nearby one-story houses were destroyed.

"When the bombing started, I fled the building — that's why I'm still alive," said Abdurakhman Matayev, a 57-year-old mechanic who lived on the ninth floor.

Rubble and ceiling plaster filled Matayev's apartment, with the roof split open to the

icy elements.

"I worked for 20 years to get this apartment," he said.

Outside, emergency crew rushed to restore power and phone lines damaged in the attacks. Matayev joined a crowd of angry Chechens and Russian on the street who denounced Yeltsin.

Chechens seemed in no mood to back down. Badly putmanned and short of equipment and ammunition, Chechen government soldiers and volunteers remain highly motivated. Many of the several thousand fighters in Grozny have taken an oath of holy war, putting on green bands around their foreheads.

The Russian jets roared over Grozny for about 25 minutes starting just after midnight, dropping bombs that had been hit. "What horror."

Kiosks were destroyed, trees were knocked down and large orange flames were visible in the distance. A man in civilian clothing lay dead across the street from the crater, flat on his back and eyes wide open.

"When I heard the planes, I hid in the corner of the room to take cover," said a tearful Zinaida Zalakhina, standing in shock next to a building that had been hit. "What horror."



President Nelson Mandela (R) congratulates his estranged wife Winnie after she had been elected to the National Executive Committee of the ANC on the last day of its 49th constitutional congress in Bloemfontein on Wednesday. Winnie came 5th among 60 members elected to the NEC, with 1,802 votes. Mandela split with her in 1992.

— AFP photo



North Korean soldiers hand over the remains of US pilot Chief Warrant Officer David Hilemon, whose OH-58 helicopter was downed in North Korea on December 17, at the border in Panmunjom, Korea on Thursday.

— AFP photo

DPRK returns US pilot's body

PANMUNJOM, Korea, Dec 22: The congressman who helped negotiate the return of the body of an American pilot whose helicopter went down in North Korea said on Thursday he hoped the surviving airman could be home for Christmas, reports AP.

But US Rep Bill Richardson said he had no commitment from Pyongyang for the airman's release by then.

Earlier Thursday, Richardson accompanied the rough reddish-brown casket carrying the body of Chief Warrant Officer David Hilemon as the North Koreans handed it over at the border crossing in the truce village of Panmunjom.

He said he had reached an agreement with North Korea that calls for the release of Chief Warrant Officer Bobby Hall, who also was aboard the

unarmed US Army OH-58C helicopter that strayed into North Korean territory last Saturday while on a routine training mission.

"To make the agreement fully certifiable and successful Bobby Hall must return," Richardson said. "And I think Bobby Hall will return ... very soon."

"My hope is, on humanitarian reasons, that it be so he can join his family in Florida for Christmas or shortly thereafter."

North Korea has said its troops shot down the chopper, although US officials cannot confirm that without talking with Hall.

Richardson said he had no firm information on what happened. He referred only to "the crash." He said he had seen Hilemon's body.

Asked about the cause of death, he said: "It is my under-

standing the North Koreans claim it was from trauma resulting from the crash."

He said some preliminary evidence appeared to support that conclusion.

Richardson told reporters he was unable to see Hall, but was able to convey his wife's love. The North Koreans have said Hall is in good condition but won't be released at least until they complete their investigation into the incident.

"The reason they indicated I could not see him was that civilians were not permitted to visit a military base," he said.

"My presumption is he is at a military base near the site of the crash."

Richardson said talks were continuing in Panmunjom on details of Hall's release.

The last radio contact with the helicopter indicated the pilot believed he was still in South Korea.



Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres (R) and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat answer journalists during a press conference at the end of their meeting in Gaza City on Wednesday. The talks, held at Arafat's seafloor headquarters in Gaza, are meant to break the deadlock over extending Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank.

— AFP photo

Tragedy of malnourished elderly in US

WASHINGTON, Dec 22: Unwrapping a five-pound block of cheese to underscore pleas for federal food aid, advocates for the poor told Congress that thousands of elderly Americans are malnourished and food pantries are turning away hungry families, reports AP.

One in five Americans is now served by a federal nutrition programme, such as school lunches or subsidised food coupons, known as food stamps. But many still don't get enough to eat, and hundreds of thousands of elderly people are malnourished, advocates and federal officials told Congressman Ron Wyden on Wednesday.

"As we speak, millions of our fellow Americans are going hungry," said Wyden, chairman of the House Small Business subcommittee on regulation, which held a hearing on the problem.

"In our rich nation, with its extraordinary resources we witness the tragedy of older people scrounging in dumpsters for their next meal. This is a picture that shames all of us as a nation."

The cheese, a symbol of the federal government's commodity giveaways of the 1980s, is no longer included in the truckloads of food distributed to anti-hunger programmes around the country even as the demand for nutrition assistance has grown.

Eleanor M. Josaitis, associate director of Focus: Hope, a civil and human rights organisation in Detroit, said low-income elderly are not getting enough protein in their diets and want the processed American cheese back in the sacks of groceries that her organisation distributes.

"If we had cheese, they could make cheese sandwiches, tuna casseroles," she said, plunking a brown box on the witness table and taking out the five-pound (2.3-kilogram) brick of cheese. "It helps people stretch their budgets."

Christine Vladimiroff, president and chief executive officer of Second Harvest, a network of 188 regional food banks based in Chicago, said local agencies are turning away hungry families because of a lack of food and funds.

The more than 42,000 community agencies served by her network include food pantries, soup kitchens, elderly feeding sites and homeless shelters.

Vladimiroff said 46 per cent of those agencies report that they have had to ration food and cut their hours of operation.

"In short, demand is up 37

per cent or more, but food donations are up only 10 per cent. We are deeply concerned," she said.

Wyden said supermarkets and food companies have reduced donations this year, due to improved efficiencies and greater salvaging of food while next year donations by federal commodities programmes will be cut by almost two-thirds.

For 73-year-old Mary Marshall of Washington, DC, "getting enough to eat is a daily challenge."

Marshall, whose legs were amputated due to health problems, lives on less than 500 dollars a month. Half of that pays the rent. She gets food stamps and supplemental food delivered to her home.

"With food stamps and the supplemental food, I am able to manage. But without them, I don't know what I would do."

GCC agrees to tackle extremism, border rows

MANAMA, Dec 22: Leaders of the six Gulf Arab states wound up a three-day summit in Bahrain on Wednesday in apparent agreement on ways of tackling border rows and Muslim fundamentalist threats, reports Reuters.

"There has been agreement on every word included in the final statement," Bahrain's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammad Bin Mubarak al-Khalifa told a news conference after the summit.

In the statement, leaders of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates called for a redoubled effort to end outstanding problems between member states before the next summit in Oman in December 1995.

Sheikh Mohammad told the news conference this referred to border disputes.

and motives



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— AFP photo

Off the Record

Call girl service using catwalk models!

PARIS: Fashion designer Francesco Smalto and his son will face trial in April for allegedly running a prostitution ring that involved runway models, officials said Wednesday, reports AP.

Smalto, 67, is accused of providing call girls for "high Gabonese personalities," said informed sources on condition of anonymity.

The women, most of them fashion models, were paid between 10,000 francs (1,850 dollars) and 50,000 francs (9,200 dollars) plus all expenses to travel to Gabon, the sources said.

Smalto, charged in June 1993, required to post bail and placed under judicial surveillance, contends he's innocent. Prostitution is legal in France but pimping is not.

His son Francois Smalto, 34, and Michel Mariani, 52, one of the designer's tailors, are to appear with Smalto in court on April 11.

The Italian-born Smalto began his business in France in 1961 and has since dressed numerous international political figures and monarchs including King Hassan II of Morocco.

Good news for the circumcised

JERUSALEM: Circumcised men are less prone to contract the killer disease AIDS than other men, Israeli professor Francis Shlafer said on Wednesday, reports AFP.

"For AIDS, as for other sexually transmissible diseases the foreskin is a prime area for contamination," Shlafer, from Soroka Hospital in Beersheba, told Israeli radio.

He said the argument was based mainly on a survey carried out in the United States in 1988.

Judaism requires males to be circumcised.

Land of God-fearing people

WASHINGTON: The United States is the land of religious believers with a vast majority of Americans believing in God, according to a national poll published on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Some 90 per cent of the Americans who answered survey questions believe there is a God, according to a CNN-USA Today poll.

Another 90 per cent of the respondents believe in heaven, 79 per cent in miracles and 72 per cent in angels, according to the poll results.

In 1981, 84 per cent of those responding said they believed in God. This year 73 per cent said they believed in hell, a rise of six per cent over 1981 figures.

The poll also showed Americans held more belief in mysticism with the number of people believing in reincarnation rising to 27 per cent this year from 21 per cent in 1990.

Malaysian MPs protest Russian veto on Bosnia

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 22: Malaysian MPs on Wednesday protested at the Russian embassy here against the recent Russian veto of a UN resolution to punish rebel Serbs in Bosnia-Herzegovina, reports AFP.

Thirty government and opposition members of parliament handed an official protest note to the embassy's First Secretary Iskander Azizov, and called on the Malaysian government to reverse a decision to buy Russian MiG-29s.

"We have agreed to urge the government to implement a buy-Russian last policy and review the purchase of the 18 fighters from Russia," MP Shahidan Kassim said.

Russia on December 2 vetoed a UN Security Council draft resolution blocking fuel

supplies to rebel Serbs saying it would have penalised the rump end to the 32 month conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Malaysia's Foreign Minister Abdulrahman Badawi has blasted Russia for the move charging that Russia had acted against the interest of the international community who want peace in Bosnia.

Shahidan said the MPs had proposed, with Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's blessing, to meet Russian President Boris Yeltsin in Moscow to convey the concern of Malaysians for the plight of Bosnian Muslims.

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