

Tripura Tiger Force kills 25 villagers

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 13: Tribal separatists Friday shot dead at least 25 villagers sleeping at a market in the northeastern Indian state of Tripura, said reports AFP.

The gunmen belonging to the outlawed All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) stormed Kalyanpur village about 100 kilometres (62 miles) from Agartala, the state capital, and opened indiscriminate fire.

Tripura Home Minister Samar Choudhury said over the telephone that the attack took place around 3:00 am (2130 GMT Thursday).

"As it was early morning most of the villagers could not react so the casualty was high," he said.

Police sources said the death toll could go up as many of the 15 injured were in serious condition. Some had been taken to hospitals in Agartala.

Choudhury said police and paramilitary forces had been rushed to the massacre site to track down the militants, who escaped after the attack.

It was the worst massacre in the region since tribal guerrillas clad in combat uniform in the nearby state of Nagaland

Network (TNL) said its full service is now available live on the worldwide web and was open to listeners from any part of the world.

The response to our test transmissions from listeners on the web have been tremendous," TNL executive director Niranjan Wickremasinghe said.

New US immigration law restricts student visas

WASHINGTON, Dec 13: A new amendment to the US immigration law which took effect recently will require foreign students who wish to attend public secondary schools in the United States to show proof of tuition payment before they can be granted a visa, reports USIS.

The new "Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996," which took effect November 30, 1996, includes provisions affecting the issuance of F-1 visas to students coming to the US to attend elementary school (grades kindergarten through 8), public secondary school (grades 9 to 12), and publicly funded adult education programmes, such as foreign language classes.

In the US, schools which are subsidised at the state and local levels are called public schools.

The US consular officers overseas will no longer be able to issue the F-1 visas for public elementary school studies or publicly funded adult education programmes. Officers may issue F-1 visas limited to no more than 12 months of public high school if the applicant demonstrates that he/she has reimbursed the school authority for the unsubsidised per capita cost

of education for the intended period of study.

However, these revisions do not apply to foreign students who wish to attend private schools or to any student participating in a J-1 exchange visitor programme. Also, the provisions do not affect dependents of other categories of visa holders visiting the US, such as E, H, J and L visa holders.

It is not yet clear what effect, if any, this legislation will have on students who were already in the US before November 30, 1996. But it will no longer be possible for foreign high school students to use the US residence of their relatives for the purpose of attending high school.

If an F-1 student in a private elementary school or publicly financed adult education transfers to a public school or programme, the visa is considered void unless requirements of the time limit (maximum 12 months) and cost conditions are met.

This student provision in Section 625 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, was passed by the US Congress and signed into law by President Clinton on September 30, 1996.



Vice President Al Gore announces on Thursday that US airline executives have voluntarily agreed to install fire detectors in the cargo area of planes. President Clinton (R), Carol Hallett (L), president of the Airline Transport Association, and some of the 15 airline executives who met the President and Vice President listen. Gore said that "with this announcement, virtually all the airlines are saying they're not going to wait for the regulatory process to catch up, they're moving forward on their own." A fire in the cargo area of a ValuJet airliner is believed to have caused the crash in Florida last May that killed 110 people.

— Reuter/UNB photo

UNSC authorises new Bosnian peacekeeping mission

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 13: The UN Security Council on Thursday approved a resolution authorising establishment of the new international peacekeeping force for Bosnia which will replace the mandate for the NATO-led mission, reports AP.

The mandate for the NATO mission expires Dec 20. It was sent to Bosnia to replace the UN peacekeeping force after Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats signed the Dayton peace agreement which ended the three and one-half year war.

Under the resolution approved unanimously, the council authorised member states to establish the multinational

stabilisation force, or SFOR, which will remain Bosnia-Herzegovina for 18 months.

The resolution also authorised a UN operation which includes an international civil police force, to remain in Bosnia for one more year until Dec 21, 1997.

It also noted that the international community cannot continue to support the peace process "without compliance and active participation" by Bosnian leaders in "rebuilding a civil society."

It also underscored the link between financial assistance and the degree of compliance by Bosnian officials with the 1995

agreement which ended the Bosnian war.

Under the resolution, troops of the new stabilisation force may "take all necessary measures to defend itself from attack or the threat of attack."

It also "demands" that the Bosnian parties respect the security and freedom of movement of the force and "other international personnel."

Russian Ambassador Sergey Lavrov told the council that the resolution gives preeminence to the civilian aspect of the Bosnian peace accords now that the threat of renewed conflict has diminished.



Italian Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini (2nd R) poses with Serbian opposition leaders, Zoran Djindjic (2nd L), Vesna Pasic (2nd L) and Vuk Draskovic, on Thursday following their meeting in Belgrade. Dini, who held talks earlier with President Slobodan Milosevic, is the first Western politician on an official visit to Yugoslavia since anti-government protests broke out three weeks ago.

— AFP/UNB photo

Jayalalitha's bail plea refused

The principal sessions judge in Chennai yesterday declined to grant bail to former Tamil Nadu chief minister and AIADMK supremo J Jayalalitha, who was arrested by the crime branch CID on December 7 in connection with the Rs. 8.5 crore colour television scam. PTI reports from Chennai.

Dismissing her petition, the Judge A Ramamoorthy observed that time was not ripe for granting bail to her.

He noted that some more witnesses were yet to be examined and releasing her now on bail would place obstacles in the way of investigation.

5 Indian boats seized in Pak waters

Pakistan's maritime security agency seized five Indian trawlers and arrested 34 fishermen in Pakistani territorial waters, the state-run television reported Thursday. AFP reports from Islamabad. The boats were operating some 20 kilometers (12 miles) inside the Pakistani zone in the Arabian Sea, it said.

The television, which showed the seized boats and the fishermen, did not specify the date when the trawlers were taken into custody.

Labour strike called off in ROK

South Korea's second largest umbrella labour union said it would call off a planned strike, averting countrywide disruption in industry and public services. AFP reports from Seoul.

The Korea Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which had planned the Friday strike to protest a new labour law, said it had called off the action so as not to inconvenience the public.

SA sets up ties with Solomon Islands

South Africa announced on Thursday it had established diplomatic relations with the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. Reuter reports from Pretoria.

The Foreign Affairs Department in Pretoria said ties at ambassadorial level had been agreed and it hoped closer links would promote mutual benefits in commerce, economics and culture.

Perry leaves for Europe

Defence Secretary William Perry headed to Europe Thursday to visit US troops returning from Bosnia on his last overseas trip in office. AFP reports from Washington.

Perry also was to meet over the weekend with German Defence Minister Volker Ruest and Austrian Defence Minister Werner Fasslabend in Germany and Austria before travelling to Brussels for a meeting of NATO defence ministers.

Jamaat threatens to boycott coming polls in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: The chief of Pakistan's main fundamentalist party on Thursday threatened to boycott the coming election if corrupt politicians were allowed to contest the polls, reports AFP.

"We will not take part in the election if the same corrupt people come forward," Qazi Hussain Ahmed of the Jamaat-I-Islami Party told a news conference.

Ahmed said his party's top council would meet on December 26 to decide whether it should participate in the February 3 election in the prevailing circumstances.

Bank to Palestinians.

The OIC, founded in 1972 to press for Israel to return occupied Arab territories, includes Egypt and other governments that have relations with Israel, as well as countries such as Malaysia that don't.

The Israeli government of hardline Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has delayed the return of Hebron, which was to occur last March, out of concern for the safety of 500 Jewish settlers who live among the city's 130,000 Palestinians.

The OIC also appealed for an end to fighting in Afghanistan and Somalia and between the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, an OIC member, and Armenia in a dispute over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

It called for an arms embargo on Afghanistan, where 20

stalled in February. Tensions have escalated since Netanyahu's election in May. Israel's deputy military chief warned this week that its army was ready to repel any attack.

The OIC also appealed for an end to fighting in Afghanistan and Somalia and between the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, an OIC member, and Armenia in a dispute over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Israel has occupied Syria's Golan Heights since the 1970s and a swath of southern Lebanon since the 1980s to ward off attacks on its northern border.

It called for an arms embargo on Afghanistan, where 20

peace missions sent by the group have failed to end a civil war that erupted between Islamists and Christians after a Communist regime was overthrown in 1992. The group said its diplomatic efforts would continue.

Afghanistan is an OIC member, but its seat at the conference was left empty after the group refused to choose between two rival factions claiming to represent the country.

Also Friday, an Indonesian human rights group submitted a letter to OIC secretary-general Hamid Alibagid of Niger calling on the organization to look after the rights of migrant workers.

About 40 women from the

Off the Record

Price for bid to marry forcibly

NEW DELHI: A postal employee in southern India had his hands severed by the parents of a girl he forcibly tried to marry.

The girl's parents tied the man to a tree at a village in Tamil Nadu state Wednesday then severed his hands after warning neighbours to keep away, the news agency said.

The man remained tied to the tree till ... police rescued him and rushed him to a hospital, PTI said.

The parents had not been arrested at the time of the report.

Wheat harvest in space

WASHINGTON: The first wheat harvest in space was carried out recently aboard the Russian space station Mir with the help of US astronaut John Blaha, NASA said Thursday, reports AFP.

The harvest was part of project Greenhouse, an experiment using 32 grains of super-dwarf wheat growing under conditions of microgravity in space, the US space agency said.

Successful growth of the wheat crop through all development phases, culminating in the harvest of seeds, demonstrates that the environment of space poses no obstacles to the biological components of a regenerative life support system," said NASA researcher David Bubbenheim.

White doves in export list

HAIKOU: Some 20,000 pairs of white doves from the United States have made their nests in Hainan, China's largest special economic zone, and more are on the way, reports Xinhua.

The doves were imported by the Hainan Hailiang Industrial Corporation in its effort to build a large bird-breeding farm.

The 15-hectare farm is being built with a total investment of 19 million yuan.



Director Tim Burton waves as he arrives with friend Lisa Marie for the premiere of his new film, "Mars Attacks" on Thursday in Hollywood, California. The comedy, which stars Jack Palance and Glenn Close, is about a visit to Earth by creatures from Mars.

— AFP/UNB photo

Congress (I) warns

United Front govt won't be able to complete its term

NEW DELHI: India's Congress (I) party warned today that the country's minority United Front government would not be able to complete its five-year term expiring in 2001, reports AFP.

But Gadgil said the 11-year-old Congress, the second largest group in the national parliament after Hindu nationalists, was in no position to take power if the present government fell.

"If we did, it would be unstable," he said. "Because we would need the support of about 100 members (of parliament) from other parties to form a government and run it. It won't work."

Dostum ready to take part in truce talks with Taliban

ISLAMABAD, Dec 13: Northern Afghan leader General Abdul Rashid Dostum told a UN envoy on Thursday that his militia was ready to take part in proposed ceasefire talks with the radical Islamic Taliban Movement, reports Reuter.

A UN official said Dostum signalled willingness during talks with UN special envoy Norbert Holl in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif to nominate a representative to a proposed six-man commission to work out details of a truce.

No other details of the talks were immediately available.

Holl, who received a similar assurance of cooperation from ousted government military Chief Ahmad Shah Masood on Sunday, hopes to meet Taliban leaders in the southern city of Kandahar in the next few days, a UN source said.

Holl is trying to convene a ceasefire working group comprising with three Taliban representatives and three from an alliance composed of factions loyal to Masood, Dostum and

The forces of Masood and Dostum are battling the Taliban militia north of Kabul and in the northwestern province of Badghis, but neither side has gained a clear military advantage.

The Taliban wants to extend its strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law throughout Afghanistan.

The forces of Masood and Dostum are battling the Taliban militia north of Kabul and in the northwestern province of Badghis, but neither side has gained a clear military advantage.

The Taliban wants to extend its strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law throughout Afghanistan.

The forces of Masood and Dostum are battling the Taliban militia north of Kabul and in the northwestern province of Badghis, but neither side has gained a clear military advantage.

The Taliban wants to extend its strict interpretation of Islamic Sharia law throughout Afghanistan.

OIC calls for pressure on Israel to end ME peace process

JAKARTA, Dec 13: Declaring Palestinian self-rule "the prime cause of all Muslims," a meeting of Islamic governments called Friday for international pressure on Israel to take further steps toward a Mideast peace settlement, reports AP.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference said that if the peace process breaks down, its 54 member nations should reconsider any plans to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel.

A statement issued at the end of a five-day conference of OIC foreign ministers criticized Israel for failing to complete its promised pullout from the city of Hebron, the last step in turning over control of the West

Bank to Palestinians.

It called for US and European pressure to "compel Israel to implement the agreements on the withdrawal of its troops ... (and) enter into serious negotiations on the final status of the Palestinian territories."

The OIC also appealed for an end to fighting in Afghanistan and Somalia and between the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, an OIC member, and Armenia in a dispute over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Israel has occupied Syria's Golan Heights since the 1970s and a swath of southern Lebanon since the 1980s to ward off attacks on its northern border.

It called for an arms embargo on Afghanistan, where 20

stalled in February. Tensions have escalated since Netanyahu's election in May. Israel's deputy military chief warned this week that its army was ready to repel any attack.

The OIC also appealed for an end to fighting in Afghanistan and Somalia and between the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, an OIC member, and Armenia in a dispute over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Israel has occupied Syria's Golan Heights since the 1970s and a swath of southern Lebanon since the 1980s to ward off attacks on its northern border.

It called for an arms embargo on Afghanistan, where 20

peace missions sent by the group have failed to end a civil war that erupted between Islamists and Christians after a Communist regime was overthrown in