

Attempt on life of Vajpayee?

SRINAGAR, India, Dec 7: A powerful bomb planted close to where Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was staying on his first visit to Kashmir rocked the state's summer capital late Sunday, police said today, reports AFP.

The deafening blast came from a tiny public toilet near the Dal Lake, destroying it, and shattering window panes of some half-a-dozen buildings in the vicinity, police and witnesses said.

No one was injured in the explosion, and police and paramilitary troops quickly sealed off the deserted area in the heart of Srinagar, the summer capital of the troubled Himalayan state.

More than half of foreign students in US are from Asia

WASHINGTON, Dec 7: Boosted by students from Asia, the number of foreign students in the United States surged 5.1 per cent to 481,200 in 1998 after four years of flat growth, says a new study released today, reports AFP.

The number of American students abroad also rose a steep 11.4 per cent from 1997 to nearly 100,000.

These figures are part of "open doors," says an annual report on international educational exchange by the Institute for International Education (IIE). The US Information Agency (USIA) funds the study. "We are delighted to see both

the increased numbers of international students choosing to study in the United States and the unparalleled numbers of US students going abroad," said Keith Geiger, USIA's director of academic programmes.

But he warned that from 1995-97, the American share of all international students dropped from 32 per cent to 30 per cent, down from 40 per cent in the 1980s.

Japan is the leading country of origin for foreign students here with 47,073, followed by China with 46,958, and South Korea 42,890. Asian students account for more than half of international student enrollment in the United States — 57.6 per cent — and increased by 6.4 per cent to 277,508 this year, the "open doors" survey reported.

found nearly 10 per cent of students from these countries dropped out in 1998. The decline in South Korean students was sharpest, with many US campuses reporting losses of up to 20 per cent.

Korean student enrollment rose 15.5 per cent, Chinese enrollment 10.5 per cent, and Indian enrollment 10.4 per cent, IIE said.

The study does not take into account the higher-than-usual dropout rate this year among the 80,000 Asian students whose home countries were hit hardest by the Asian financial crisis: Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand.

An IIE survey in March

found nearly 10 per cent of students from these countries dropped out in 1998. The decline in South Korean students was sharpest, with many US campuses reporting losses of up to 20 per cent.

The US government says foreign students contribute more than \$7.5 billion dollars to the US economy annually in their school fees and living expenses.

Business administration and engineering remain the top fields of study for international students, while the number of computer science majors surged 20 per cent and arts majors grew 14.7 per cent.

Foreign students comprise just three per cent of the US student population at colleges and universities, but the commerce department ranks higher education as the country's fifth-

largest service export.

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Most American students still go to Western Europe, but more are heading to Asia and Latin America — those traveling to Australia rose 16.8 per cent, China 16.5 per cent, Costa Rica 13.5 per cent, and Mexico 10.4 per cent.

Sixty-eight per cent of all foreign students receive most of their funds from family and personal sources. More than 75 per cent receive most of their funding from sources outside the United States, IIE said.

Police said carpenters digging a hold to install a septic tank found the bomb 15 days ago under the house in Tacloban City but did not report it to authorities.

The house owner called three friends Monday to try to open the bomb, hoping they could sell its power, a police investigator said.

Forty-three per cent were East Asian nationals: China accounted for 10,709, Japan 5,472, and Korea 4,520.

World War II bomb explodes: Four Filipinos killed

MANILA, Dec 7: A World War II-vintage bomb dug up by men under a house exploded Monday in a central Philippine city, killing the house owner and three others, police said, reported AFP.

Police said carpenters digging a hold to install a septic tank found the bomb 15 days ago under the house in Tacloban City but did not report it to authorities.

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The 1,000-pound bomb went off as the men were tinkering with its, instantly killing them and destroying the house.

Azizan now says Anwar did not sodomise him

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 7: In a startling turnaround, a key witness whose allegations form the bulk of sex charges against jailed politician Anwar Ibrahim, denied Monday that he was ever sodomised by the former deputy prime minister, reports AP.

Azizan Abu Bakar, the former driver of Anwar's wife, has for the last week testified Anwar repeatedly forced him into sodomy, a crime in this predominantly Muslim nation.

But when the trial resumed after the weekend recess, he told his cross-examiner that he had not been sodomised.

Anwar is currently on trial on four counts of abuse of power. He will be tried later on another charge of corruption and five charges of committing illegal sex acts.

He has denied any wrongdoing, calling the charges part of a high-level conspiracy to ruin his political career.

If the defence punches out holes in Anwar's testimony, he could be a crushing blow for

prosecutors who have based the most serious charge of illegal sex acts mostly on Azizan's accusations.

Taken aback at Azizan's retraction, defence attorney Christopher Fernando repeated his question as a hushed silence fell on the courtroom and everyone strained to hear the answer.

Azizan and Ummi have retracted their accusations earlier, but at the trial they said they were arrested and coerced by police, allegedly at Anwar's behest, to sign retractions.

During cross-examination last week, Azizan wavered on his testimony, prompting the defense lawyer's accusations that his story was inconsistent and contradictory.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad fired Anwar on Sept. 2, saying he had determined Anwar was morally unfit for office. The sacking led to demands for political reforms and massive anti-government protests in the normally placid Southeast Asian capital.

11 hurt as rival political groups clash in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Dec 7: Eleven people were injured when supporters of rival political parties clashed in an Indonesian town, news report said Monday, reports AP.

Fighting broke out on Sunday in Brebes, about 250 kilometers (150 miles) east of the capital, Jakarta, between followers of the ruling Golkar Party and the Indonesian Democratic Party, or PDI, who are loyal to opposition figure Megawati Sukarnoputri.

The newspaper Kompas said PDI supporters in three trucks and on hundreds of motorcycles went through the town and burned Golkar flags. They then assembled outside a sports stadium where about 7,000 Golkar supporters were holding a rally.

The two groups clashed at the stadium's gates before being broken up by police.

The paper said 19 vehicles were damaged.

Also on Sunday Megawati, the eldest daughter of Indonesia's founding President Sukarno, staged a rally in Jakarta where she called on her supporters not to resort to violence.

China likely to put dissident on trial

BEIJING, Dec 7: Speeding up a campaign to stamp out a would-be political opposition party, Chinese authorities will put one of its leading organisers on trial next week, a rights group reported Monday, reports AP.

Court officials in east China's Hangzhou city notified Wang Youcai's wife Monday that his trial on charges of "inciting the overthrow of state power" will be held Dec 17, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre of Human Rights and Democratic Movement in China reported.

Detained a month ago, Wang was only formally arrested on Nov 30, part of a concerted effort to silence the leadership of the China Democracy Party.

Authorities appear to be moving with haste against the three dissidents. To arrest and try Wang in what would be 18 days is unusual, especially in such a politically sensitive case. The Information Center called the speed proof that Chinese leaders have already decided to convict Wang.

Yeltsin dismissed Chief of Staff Valentin Yumashev and his deputies Yuri Yarov, Mikhail Komissar and Yevgeny Savostyanov, a Kremlin spokesman said.

Nikolai Bordyuzha, the secretary of the presidential security council, was appointed the new chief of staff, while the other posts remain vacant. Bordyuzha, who will serve in both posts, was chief of the Border Guards before his appointment to the post earlier this year.

The Kremlin had no immediate comment on the sudden dismissals.

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