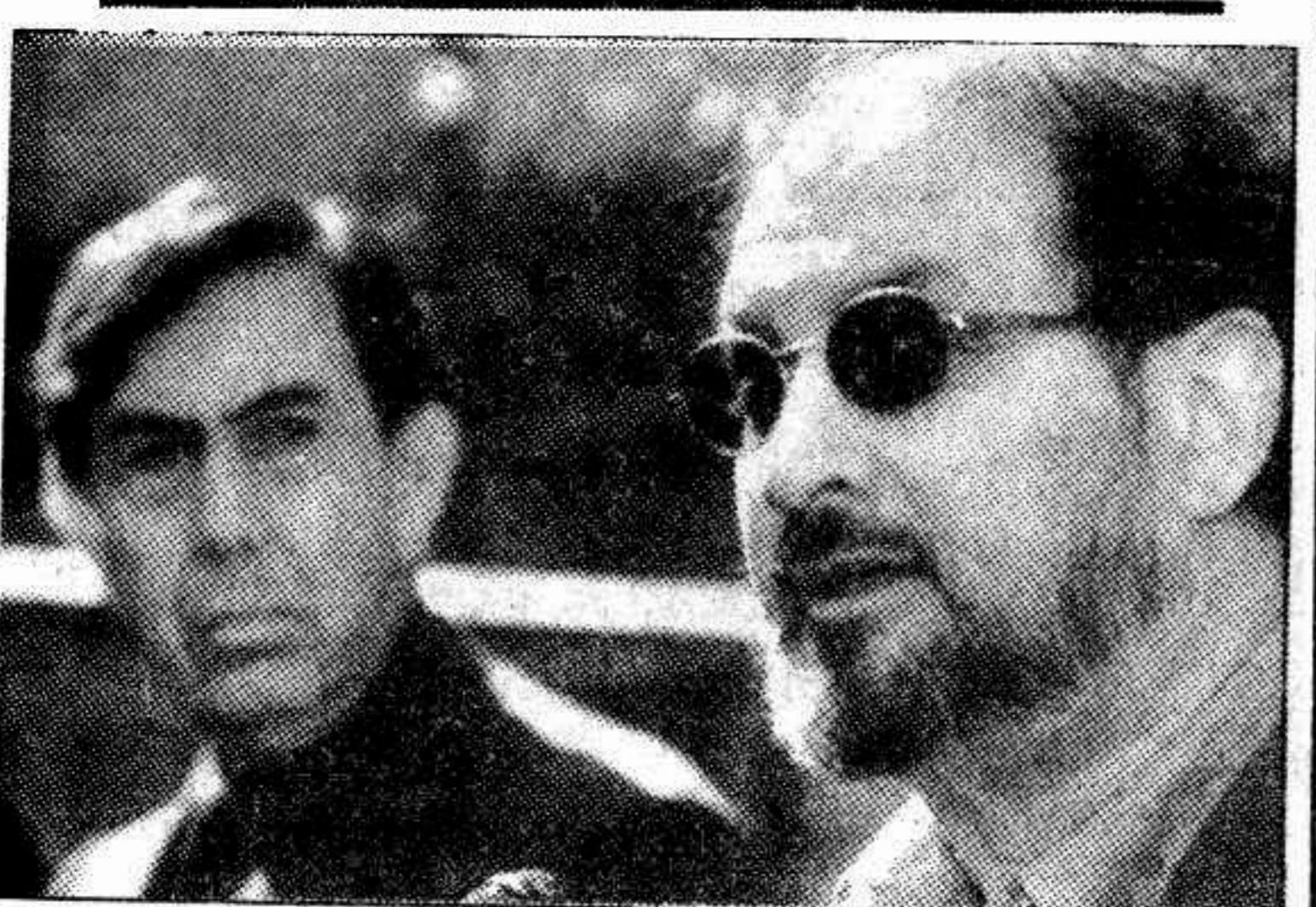


International

BRIEFLY



Flanked by Mexico City Mayor Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, right, author Salman Rushdie speaks at a "Cities of Refuge" centre for persecuted writers in Mexico City on Monday. The new centre is one of 32 such centres worldwide designed to serve as a refuge for persecuted and oppressed writers.

— AP/UNB photo

Tigers bomb army bases in Lanka: Tamil Tiger guerrillas fired mortar bombs at army positions in northern Sri Lanka, killing at least one soldier and wounding two others, the Defence Ministry said yesterday. AFP reports from Colombo.

Government forces retaliated in kind during the clash on Monday but rebel casualties were not immediately known, a ministry spokesman said. However, he said two members of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were killed by troops in two other clashes in the north of the country on Monday.

Colombia seized huge weapons: The Colombian Navy on Monday captured a boatload of weaponry bound for guerrillas in Colombia, a navy spokesman said. AFP reports from Bogota.

The weapons appeared to be for Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas and may have come from El Salvador, the spokesman said. The shipment included 25 rifles, one machine gun, two submachine guns and more than 40,000 rounds of ammunition, a navy spokesman said.

3 drowned in Red river in Hanoi: Three students have drowned in the Red River in Hanoi, a teacher and the police said yesterday. AFP reports from Hanoi.

Five of a group of 11 students who were playing on a sandbank of the biggest river of the Vietnamese capital dropped into a whirlpool when the ground suddenly sank in the afternoon of last Friday, the teacher told AFP.

The three were taken away and drowned while the other two were saved by a boatman, police said.

14 die as footbridge collapses in China: Fourteen people died and an unknown number were still missing after a footbridge in southwestern China collapsed, officials said yesterday. AFP reports from Beijing.

The 180-metre (600-foot) bridge at Oijiang country in Chongqing collapsed Monday, plunging about 20 armed police and an undetermined number of civilian pedestrians into the Oijiang River, officials told AFP by telephone.

Shanghai trains 50,000 students: Shanghai, China's economic and commercial centre, has trained over 50,000 post-graduate students over the last 20 years, Xinhua reports from Shanghai.

The figure includes 45,000 master's degrees and 4,500 doctor's degrees. Shanghai has established a comprehensive system of academic studies and training programmes in recent years, according to one local official.

US hiker killed in NZ: An American hiker from Huntington Beach, California, died after falling down a rock face while crossing the Ball Pass in Mount Cook National Park, police said Tuesday. AP reports from Wellington.

The victim was Paul Gerard Hornack, a management consultant, police said. One of a party of two 44-year-old men being guided over the pass Monday toward the Caroline Hut, near Mount Cook, he stumbled, overbalanced and lost his footing.

Japanese FM begins UK, ME tour: Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura left Tokyo yesterday for Britain and Middle East countries to help accelerate the Middle East peace process, AFP reports from Tokyo.

The nine-day tour will take him to Britain, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the Palestinian autonomous region and Israel to underline Japan's plan to help the peace process with economic aid, foreign Ministry officials said.

China to carry out its 1st manned space flight

SHANGHAI, Jan 5: China has announced plans to carry out its first manned space flights "by the end of this century or the beginning of the next," the official Liberation Daily reported today, says AFP.

Success would make China first country in more than 30 years to join the United States and Russia — including the former Soviet Union — in the exclusive club of manned space mission launchers.

"In future, the country will follow the advancement of world space technology development, and try its best to attain manned space flight by the end of this century or the beginning of the next," the newspaper said, citing a dispatch from the official Xinhua news agency.

The front-page report, which quoted an unspecified news

source in the space industry, gave no exact timetable.

"Research institutions have already begun research on this area and made some achievements," it said.

Manned space flights are seen as needed "to maintain a position internationally" in the space industry, the report said; adding that the achievement would lead to more opportunities to advance China's space technology.

XU Dazhe, a top domestic aerospace scientist, said earlier this year that the immediate task toward manned flights was to boost Chinese rockets' payload capacity.

The boosters have only placed five-tonne satellites in low geostationary orbits to date, but manned missions would require lifting capacity of 20 tonnes or more, said XU.

Indian Prime Minister says Attacks on Christians part of conspiracy to oust BJP-led govt

NEW DELHI, Jan 5: The recent attacks on Christians in western India is part of a conspiracy to discredit and overthrow the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government, the prime minister said on Monday, reports AP.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee said he would thwart such efforts, the Press Trust of India reported.

Vajpayee was speaking at a public meeting in the southern city of Bangalore where he took part in a two-day meeting of the BJP's national executive.

The prime minister did not say who these conspirators were.

Over the last two weeks, Christians and their properties have been attacked and dozens

of churches have been destroyed in the western state of Gujarat. The state is also ruled by the BJP.

Militant Hindus say missionaries are forcibly converting Hindus.

Christians, who are a mere 2.5 per cent of India's overwhelming Hindu population, deny this.

Federal investigators sent probe the attacks blamed Hindu right-wing groups who share the BJP's right-wing ideological background. But the BJP has not been directly blamed.

The BJP head a coalition of 19 parties with varying ideologies and it has toned down its rhetoric to make its leadership more acceptable.

Over the last few days, Vajpayee been deeply criticised

The BJP has criticised the anti-Christian violence and assured full protection to them, but Christian groups say these are mere words and the government needs to show in more concrete terms that it will take action.

But the BJP has refused calls for a ban on the Hindu groups accused of orchestrating the violence and for imposing federal rule on the state to ensure peace.

During his speech on Monday, Vajpayee said he feared that published reports on the attacks were exaggerated and that he himself would visit Gujarat to assess the situation, PTI said.

Over the last few days, Vajpayee been deeply criticised

by both his allies and members of the opposition for the anti-Christian attacks. He has found it difficult to defend his government despite assurances that the matter will be dealt with speedily.

Last week, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, or the World Hindu Council, one of the groups accused for the violence, said it was being targeted as part of a "global conspiracy" because it was linked to the BJP. Giriraj Kishore, the VHP's vice president, was quoted in newspapers as saying the goal was to create support for Congress Party leader Gandhi, an Italian-born Catholic.

Kishore did not substantiate his allegations.

Saddam's son directed executions of Shiite dissidents, claims US

WASHINGTON, Jan 5: One of the sons of Iraqi president Saddam Hussein directed the murder of hundreds of Iraqi dissidents last November in the Shiite region of southern Iraq, the State Department said Monday, reports AP.

Spokesman James P Rubin said tensions in the south, a stronghold of anti-Saddam sentiment, rose after the assassinations of two senior Islamic clerics this summer.

Over the past six weeks, he said, there have been reports of mass arrests throughout the southern region and in the Shiite areas outside Baghdad. Also, there have been hundreds of summary executions of dissidents at two prisons, he said.

The repression reportedly reached a peak in November, with hundreds killed in actions directed personally by Quasim Hussein, Rubin said.

"Regime military action

Killing in Shiite mosque

Pak police arrest dozens of Sunni militants

MULTAN, Jan 5: Police arrested dozens of Sunni Muslim militants Tuesday in connection with the slaughter of 16 Shiite Muslim worshippers shot and killed as they prayed in a mosque in eastern Punjab province, reports AP.

Police and paramilitary soldiers were deployed by the hundreds throughout the province as mourners prepared to bury the victims of Sunday's vicious attack.

Four gunmen roared into a Shiite Muslim mosque in a small village of Qureshi More, several kilometres from here. They killed 16 worshippers who were completing their morning prayers before beginning their day long fast. Another 25 people were hurt, several of them seriously.

The youngest victim was a 12-year-old boy.

"I sent my son to the mosque to pray and he was brought home to me dead," said his mother Razia Bibi, who wrapped her son in a shawl shaking and crying.

Security forces set up check points, blocked roads and searched vehicles in the area.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who escaped an assassination attempt on Sunday outside the Punjab provincial capital of Lahore vowed to end terrorism.

The police are blaming the



From left, Vice President Al Gore, his wife Tipper, California Governor Gray Davis, his wife Sharon, and former governor Pete Wilson with his wife Gayle acknowledge the crowd after Davis was sworn in as the 37th Governor of the State of California Monday, in Sacramento. — AP/UNB photo

Trial continues

Anwar's lawyers accuse police of planting stains on mattress

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 5: Lawyers defending sacked Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in his sex and corruption trial on Tuesday accused police of planting seminal fluid stains on a mattress, reports AP.

Security officials said three teams were now probing Sunday's blast in Lahore, capital of Punjab province, on a route Sharif was expected to travel later in the day.

A special anti-terrorist cell was leading an investigation with the help of teams from the Central Investigation Agency and police into the blast under a bridge on the road from Lahore to Sharif's farmhouse at Rainwind, 35 km to the south, police sources said.

They said about 10 people had been detained for questioning but it was too early to say if they were suspects.

No one has claimed responsibility for the blast and a motive is still unknown.

Taliban paper says

Bin Laden has many supporters among Muslims

KABUL, Jan 5: The Taliban's Sharif newspaper said Tuesday that Osama Bin Laden — Washington's enemy No 1 — has a lot of friends within the Muslim world, who support his demands that US troops pull out of Saudi Arabia, reports AP.

It is God's house and non-Muslims should not be there," the Sharif newspaper said. "If the Americans leave Saudi Arabia the entire Muslim world would be happy."

More than 13,000 Israeli

ing cross-examination.

"Do you know that semen could have been extracted from Anwar Ibrahim while he was unconscious and planted on the mattress that was in police custody?" he asked.

The mattress in question was seized by Assistant Superintendent of Police Mohamad Rodwan Mohamad Yusof, who on Monday testified how he collected the mattress from an apartment and brought it to the police headquarters.

Prosecutors say that it had

13 stains, which on chemical analysis by state DNA experts turned out to match Anwar's.

They are trying to prove Anwar used the apartment for secret sexual rendezvous, committing adultery and sodomy, both crimes in this predominantly Muslim country.

The semen stains, prosecutors have implied, are proof that he had an affair with his secretary's wife and repeatedly sodomised his former driver.

"Our allegation was that these seminal stains were planted on the mattress," Fernando said.

Mohamad Rodwan said he did not know if semen was extracted when Anwar was unconscious.

The 51-year-old politician was beaten at the police headquarters soon after armed guards wearing ski masks marched him out of his Kuala Lumpur home on Sept 20. He showed up in court for his arraignment with a black eye and bruises.

The government ordered an inquiry, but no report has been released yet.

Anwar's lawyers have been

reeling under an avalanche of scientific evidence from DNA tests produced by the prosecutors last week. The judge rejected a request by the defence to bring its own DNA analyst to go head-to-head with the state DNA expert.

The Palestinians hope to make East Jerusalem the capital of a state of their own. Under the Oslo peace accords, the future of the city is to be negotiated between the two sides.

The Knesset gave preliminary approval to the Golan Bill in July. An official Syrian newspaper described the decision as a "declaration of war" and a "direct challenge to the whole international community and the United Nations."

But on Tuesday, the defence attempted to prove that even if the stains on the mattress matched Anwar's DNA, it did not prove the charges against him.



United States National Guard Spc Kerry Hyson, of Taunton, wipes a tear from her eye as she stands with fellow soldiers as patriotic music is played during departure ceremonies at the Massachusetts Military Reservation, in Bourne Monday. Ten National Guard soldiers, all trained in air traffic control, will be deployed to Bosnia-Herzegovina in support of the NATO peacekeeping effort.

— AP/UNB photo

Iraq requests UN to replace US, UK aid workers

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 5: The Iraqi government on Monday formally requested the replacement of US and British humanitarian workers in Iraq following last month's air strikes by the United States and Britain against Iraqi targets, reports AP.

In a memorandum transmitted to the UN Security Council, the authorities said that "Iraq cannot guarantee the safety of personnel of these two nations."

"We have accordingly requested that the personnel in question be replaced in view of prevailing circumstances arising out of the Anglo-American aggression," the note said.

John Mills, the spokesman for the UN humanitarian programme in Iraq, declined to comment on the Iraqi demand but told AFP that "The United Nations is studying the issue closely."

He said that the UN legal department was looking into the matter.

Western diplomats said that a total of 14 British and US nationals had been informed that

the Iraqi authorities wanted their replacement.

The entry visas of 10 — nine Britons and one US national — would not be renewed, while four other Britons working for UN contractors would be told to leave Iraq on completion of their assignment.

Three other US nationals working for the programme in Baghdad were, meanwhile, told they could remain in the Iraqi capital.

US State Department spokesman James Rubin played down the Iraqi request, saying that Iraq's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, Saeed Hasan, had verbally informed UN officials that no UN workers would be expelled, and that the denial of entry visas was "a temporary measure."

The 14 affected by the Iraqi decision, 12 are deployed in northern Iraq, while the two others — both British nationals — were in Baghdad.

The no-fly zone was extended to the south the following year to protect the Shi'ite Muslim minority.