



Outgoing Indonesian military chief General Wiranto (R) watches his successor Admiral Widodo sign a transfer of power document during the handover ceremony at the Military Headquarters in Jakarta yesterday. —AFP photo

Attack on army camp in Kashmir leaves 9 dead

SRINAGAR, India, Nov 4: Indian soldiers today killed two Muslim guerrillas who shot dead seven members of the security forces in a suicide attack on Kashmir's biggest military base, reports AFP.

The rebel attack on the Badami Bagh cantonment, on the outskirts of the summer capital Srinagar, started Wednesday evening and ended with the militants' death early today.

The entire complex and its surrounding areas remained cordoned off by Indian soldiers, who detained for questioning three local journalists who had reached the complex minutes before the guerrilla raid.

The journalists had come to meet Major P. Purshottam, the army's public relations officer who was among those killed in the daring attack.

The other victims included five soldiers and a border guard who was slain outside the complex.

The hardline pro-Pakistan Lashkar-e-Taiba separatist group claimed responsibility for the attack, identifying the two dead guerrillas as Abu Dalha and Abu Marwa.

A Lashkar spokesman said both were members of a suicide squad.

The Badami Bagh cantonment houses hundreds of Indian soldiers as well as a huge fuel depot and armoury. It is the headquarters of the army's 15 Corps, which controls the entire Kashmir Valley.

It was the first militant attack on the tightly-guarded military complex since the outbreak of a bloody insurgency in the Himalayan state of Kashmir in 1989.

"Things are now quiet, and we are conducting mopping up operations," an army spokesman told AFP. "The movement of civilians in the entire area has been barred for now."

The army also blocked traffic on a nearby highway, stranding about 1,000 people in heavy rains. The troops stopped people living in the area from leaving their homes.

"There is a house-to-house search going on," a resident said over the telephone.

A trader who fled the area -- leaving his shop open immediately after the militant attack began -- said he was afraid to return.

"Such a thing has never hap-

pened in a high-security zone," said the shopkeeper, Zahoor Ahmed. "I have no idea what has happened to my shop."

According to military officials, the heavily-armed guerrillas scaled the boundary wall of the complex and started hurling grenades, sparking a fierce shootout.

The guerrillas first killed a Border Security Force soldier outside the complex. Inside, the first to die was Major Purshottam, followed by two junior commissioned officers, an army driver and two army clerks.

All the army men were unarmed at the time of the attack.

Major Purshottam, whose office was closest to the main gate, was meeting with the three journalists, triggering speculation they may have also died.

After the initial confusion, the soldiers in the camp regrouped and started firing at the attackers, who entered an administrative block near the public relations office.

Intermittent gunbattles continued until 2:00 a.m., after which troops fired rockets to destroy Major Purshottam's office and the administrative block, killing the attackers.

Indonesian President to embark on ASEAN tour

JAKARTA, Nov 4: New Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid on Saturday embarks on a whirlwind five-day tour of eight neighbouring southeast Asian countries, determined to show Jakarta's priorities lie close to home, reports AFP.

Wahid will travel in rapid succession to Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Philippines with only four overnight stops on the way.

The trip will consist of non-ceremonial working visits, reviving an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) tradition from the Suharto days when the group settled their differences on the golf course.

There will be no golf for Wahid, who has difficulty moving without support and is almost blind, the result of two strokes. But few doubt, judging from the gruelling pace he has set since assuming office on October 20 that he will last the pace, if not set it.

Indonesian sources say the main purpose of Wahid's first trip abroad since becoming president will be to get to know his fellow regional leaders.

The second purpose will be to emphasise Indonesia is back on the stage with an Asia-first itinerary after two years of turmoil which saw the fall of Suharto, often seen in the past as ASEAN's founding father, deadly riots, the almost total collapse of the corruption-ridden economy and the East Timor debacle.



Members of a radical Hindu group shout slogans during a demonstration near parliament in New Delhi yesterday to protest alleged forced conversions by Catholic missionaries in India. Pope John Paul II's visit has sparked protests from right wing Hindus who have demanded a papal apology for alleged atrocities committed by early Christian settlers 400 years ago. —AFP photo

Bofors scandal Indian court orders arrest of Italian

NEW DELHI, Nov 4: An Indian court Thursday ordered the arrest of an Italian businessman and close family friend of opposition leader Sonia Gandhi in connection with a 1986 Swedish arms deal scandal, reports AFP.

The arrest warrant was issued against Ottavio Quattrocchi, who is presently not in India and who has denied any involvement in the scandal.

The order came after the court formally accepted a chargesheet filed by federal investigators that also named assassinated former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The Central Bureau of Investigations (CBI) named Quattrocchi as one of five suspects who took 14.2 million dollars in kickbacks to get a 1.3 billion dollar contract awarded to Bofors of Sweden.

Sources say Sonia Gandhi, leader of the Congress party and Rajiv Gandhi's widow, is likely to be summoned to court to explain her family's relationship with the Italian businessman.

The CBI chargesheet accused Rajiv Gandhi of abusing his position to stall visits by officials from Bofors to inquire into the case in 1987.

It was the first time after 13 years of investigations that Gandhi had been officially named in the scandal, and the move drew strong protests from the Congress party.

Rajiv Gandhi had always denied any wrongdoing, but the scandal lost him the 1989 general election.

The CBI also filed charges against Bofors, its former chief Martin Ardbo, a former top defence bureaucrat, S.K. Bhatnagar, and expatriate Indian ty-

Sonia rules out understanding with BJP govt

FURSATGANJ (UP), Nov 4: Congress President Sonia Gandhi yesterday ruled out her Party entering into an understanding with the Vajpayee government to have Rajiv Gandhi's name removed from the Bofors payoff chargesheet and said there are allegations that the Prime Minister's office was protecting a big business house.

"I am not going to bargain on this issue. Not at all," Gandhi told reporters when asked if Congress had promised cooperation with the government in parliament in return for deletion of Rajiv Gandhi's name from the chargesheet.

She said the name of a person (Rajiv Gandhi), against whom there is not a shred of evidence, is being dragged into the controversy while there are allegations that the Prime Minister's office is protecting a big business house.

Floods kill 111 in Vietnam

HUE, Vietnam, Nov 4: At least 111 people have been killed and more are missing after the worst flooding to hit central Vietnam in four decades, officials said on Thursday, reports AFP.

Residents of Hue, the former imperial capital which is at the heart of the worst-affected area, recounted today how they were forced to flee to high ground or take refuge on rooftops when flood waters started to flow into the city on Tuesday.

"The floods have caused at least 111 deaths, 12 missing and 15 injuries," said Huynh Bich, a senior official with the government's provincial flood and typhoon committee based in the coastal town of Danang.



A woman leaves her flooded house on a bamboo boat in Hoi An City, central Vietnam on Wednesday. Official said that at least 111 people have drowned after fresh flooding hit central Vietnam this week. The floods, which have plagued the region for two weeks, are being fed by the heaviest torrential rains the country has seen in 40 years. — AFP photo

"Some 200,000 homes have been damaged or destroyed and the damages are estimated at 150 billion dong (about 10 million dollars)," he told AFP.

Other unconfirmed reports in the former royal capital of Hue, suggested the death toll could be even higher. One source said around 500 people may have died in central regions.

The floods are being swelled by torrential rains that have blanketed the country's seven central provinces, especially Thua Thien Hue, since the beginning of the week.

"These are the most murderous and devastating floods to hit central Vietnam in 40 years and the situation has been made worse by the rupture of dikes along several rivers," Bich said.

Floods as deep as six metres (18 feet) have inundated large swaths of the countryside after the Hong river burst its banks, witnesses said.

Some of the dead were from a village upstream from Hue, which was washed away by a wall of water, according to local officials.

Water levels in the city centre rose as high as 1.5 metres, witnesses told AFP.

Foreign tourists and a delegation from the Thai government and Thai Airways have been trapped in a hotel here for two days.

Flood waters had moderated slightly by Thursday and torrential rains had abated enough for some residents to start clearing sludge and mud from their homes.

In the entire Thua Thien Hue province, telecommunications, electricity, roads, railways and air links have largely been cut off.

Local authorities and armed forces units have been mobilised to help victims of the disaster and an emergency airlift has been set up.

Anwar taken to hospital

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 4: Ousted deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim was taken to the hospital today for another battery of medical tests after he complained of recurrent headaches that have caused several disruptions to his sodomy trial, reports AFP.

After testifying on Friday for the first time since his arrest, Anwar said he felt ill and the judge adjourned his hearing until Friday.

Anwar was later taken to see a doctor in the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital, his lawyers said.

"I'm going to see the doctor there when I decide if he should be admitted to another hospital, the National University Hospital, for more extensive tests," defence attorney Pawancheek Marican told AP.

The five-month trial has been adjourned several times over the past eight weeks due to Anwar's health.

Anwar, who is already serving a six-year prison term for corruption, underwent a brain scan earlier this week to determine the cause of his severe headaches but doctors have yet to say what is causing the pain. He has lost nearly 12 kilograms (26 pounds) while in prison and suffers blood pressure fluctuations.

The 52-year-old politician was admitted to the National University Hospital for several weeks in September after he alleged he was being poisoned with arsenic in prison.

Pope begins India visit today

VATICAN CITY, Nov 4: Pope John-Paul II begins a visit to India Friday with a message that the world's religions should foster dialogue between themselves but amid fears that the trip could be disrupted by Hindu fanatics, reports AFP.

The visit -- the pope's 89th to Roman Catholics throughout the world since taking over the papacy in 1978 -- comes only days after he appealed to religious leaders worldwide "not to use religion to encourage hatred or violence or discrimination."

A Vatican official said Monday the pope was "sad and pre-occupied" with anti-Christian attacks in India, in the first direct comment on the issue from the Holy See, after about 150 acts of violence against Christians were reported in the past two years.

On Tuesday an official of the Shiv Sena political party, a powerful force in India's most industrialised state of Maharashtra, said police in New Delhi had arrested nine top leaders of the Hindu rightwing party ahead of John-Paul II's visit.

Police described the arrests as a "preventive" measure.

The party has threatened to disrupt the November 5-8 papal visit and wants the pontiff to apologise for alleged abuses by early Christian missionaries and settlers about 400 years ago.

Sena activists have already burnt an effigy, symbolising alleged forced conversions by Christian missionaries, in a New Delhi protest.

The visit will be the pope's second to India but unlike a 10-day tour in February 1986 that took in New Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Goa will be limited to the Indian capital.

In New Delhi, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, which in India has only a small following of about 16 million in a population of some 950 million, is to meet with the leaders of other religions and address the results of an Asian bishops' synod.

The 1998 meeting had called for interdenominational dialogue amid reports from India of anti-Christian violence.

Indian authorities have ordered tight security measures for the visit but concern among India's episcopate, one of the church's most numerous with 180 prelates, remains high, notably for the safety of believers who will attend mass at New Delhi's Nehru stadium.

Violence against Christians in the predominantly Hindu nation has been rampant over the past two years and included the gruesome deaths of an Australian missionary and his two sons and arson attacks on churches last Christmas.

Chinese president returns home

Chinese President Jiang Zemin returned to Beijing Thursday morning after winding up a six-nation state visit, the official Xinhua news agency said, AFP reports from Beijing.

Jiang visited Britain and France, where he was dogged by protests, as well as Portugal, Morocco, Algeria and Saudi Arabia. He flew back from Daman, Saudi Arabia, returning on the same flight as Jiang's entourage, including his wife Wang Yeping, Vice-Premier Qian Qichen and his wife Zhou Hangiong, Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, minister in charge of the State Development Planning Commission Zeng Peiyuan, Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Shi Guangsheng, and other senior officials.

Kaunda's son shot dead in Zambia

A son of Zambia's former president Kenneth Kaunda died early on Thursday after being shot by gunmen in an apparent car theft, hospital sources said, AFP reports from Lusaka.

The University Teaching Hospital said Wezi Kaunda suffered four bullet wounds in an attack on Wednesday night. He was a key adviser to his father, who still leads the opposition United National Independence Party (UNIP) after losing 1991 elections to President Frederick Chiluba. Wezi served as deputy minister of home affairs in Kaunda's last government.

Russia allows Chechen refugees to cross border

KAVKAZ, Russia, Nov 4: Russian soldiers let hundreds of Chechens fleeing the war cross the border to safety today, as a United Nations mission arrived to evaluate the worsening refugee crisis, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, federal warplanes and artillery continued to blast villages across the rebel republic.

A line of cold, hungry and exhausted refugees stretching for kilometres, inched forward as border guards, acting on orders from Moscow, waved past several buses packed with people, an AFP correspondent reported.

"We intend to let through 20 buses an hour into Ingushetia," a high-ranking Ingush frontier official, Amirkhon Dudarov, told AFP.

The Kavkaz frontier post, shut down by the Russians for ten days, was reopened Monday. But since then only some 200 people were allowed through each day, causing scenes of misery and desperation on the Chechen side.

Late Wednesday, some 1,000 Chechen refugees were allowed to cross into Ingushetia, after pressure from Ingush President Ruslan Aushev and ahead of the arrival Thursday of the UN humanitarian mission.

The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR), which is leading the mission, on Wednesday demanded that Moscow reopen the border, comparing the plight of the refugees to the suffering in Kosovo earlier this year.

The small team was dispatched by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to assess the needs of the nearly 200,000 refugees who have fled since Russia opened an air assault against the rebel republic on September 5.

Most crossed into the tiny neighbouring Russian republic of Ingushetia, whose population only numbers 340,000, and which has been swamped by the refugee influx.

Russian Prime Minister Putin sent Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu to the border areas in North Ossetia and Ingushetia to inspect the humanitarian situation.

Fierce fighting in Lanka Death toll 222

COLOMBO, Nov 4: Ferocious battles raged in Sri Lanka today as the army sent thousands of reinforcements to battle incursions by Tiger rebels, who captured two key bases and inflicted heavy losses, officials said, reports AFP.

The deployment came as the Tigers said they were advancing on several military bases after overrunning the military-held towns of Oddusudan and Nedunkerni in the bloodiest fighting in 14 months.

Oddusudan and Nedunkerni are strategically located on the western flank of the rebels' main stronghold of Mullaitivu on the northeastern coast of the island.

The defence ministry in a statement admitted troops had lost the two strategically important bases and placed the total dead on both sides at 222. The army lost 107 troops while the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) lost 115, the ministry said. However, the rebels said they lost only 53 of their fighters.

The LTTE had initially offered to return the bodies of dead government soldiers, but the International Committee of the Red Cross was unable to effect the transfer because of the intense fighting, official sources said.

"After heavy confrontations, security forces have fallen back tactically to areas south of Oddusudan and Nedunkerni," the ministry said. It said heavy fighting raged as troops resisted rebel assaults elsewhere in the region.

"A large number of security personnel have regrouped and prevented further LTTE efforts of infiltrations into the areas south of Oddusudan, Nedunkerni and Ottiyamali (in the Wannai region)," the ministry said.

Fighting in the Wannai region since Tuesday has left hundreds killed and wounded among Tiger rebels and security forces.

The government reinforcements were passing through the northern town of Vavuniya, 260 kilometres north of here, and were moving further north to prevent a rebel advance, officials in the town told AFP.

The LTTE, which on Tuesday seized control of Oddusudan, said they had consolidated their gains by capturing the nearby military base at Nedunkerni and were advancing on other camps in the region.

In a statement issued from their London office, the Tigers said they had killed or wounded more than 1,000 government troops in the last two days.

Gunman kills 2 in Seattle

SEATTLE, Washington, Nov 4: A gunman wearing a camouflage jacket and sunglasses opened fire in a shipyard office here Wednesday, killing two and wounding two others in the second such deadly shooting in the United States in two days, reports AFP.

An intense police search continued for the suspect, who fled on foot and was still at large late Wednesday, police said.

The four men were shot in the Northlake Shipyard office in Seattle's shipyard district by an unidentified man believed to be wielding a nine-millimetre semi-automatic pistol.

"He walked in and started shooting," said police spokeswoman Pam McCammon. "That's all we know."

One victim died at the scene, while a second died later at Harborview Medical Center, officials said.

The shooter was described as 1.80 metres (five feet, 11 inches) tall, a white man or light complexion, black man with a "scraggly" beard or moustache, police said.

A woman who works in an office across the hallway from where the shootings occurred said she saw a man in his 30s walk calmly into the building at around 10:32 a.m. (0030 BST).

Blast kills one in Pakistan

LAHORE, Pakistan, Nov 4: A man was killed and 17 were injured today when a bomb exploded in a restaurant in the town of Muridke where a Pakistani based Islamic militant group is holding its annual congregation, police said, reports AFP.

Witnesses said the bomb was apparently placed in the main hall of the roadside restaurant, located near a shrine of the minority Shiite Muslim community.

One person died on the spot while 17 others were injured, two of them seriously, police said, adding the building was badly damaged.

Police have cordoned off the blast site.

Administration officials said they were investigating the motive behind the bombing.

The blast took place about two kilometres from the annual gathering of the Islamic militant group Lashkar-i-Taiba, residents said.

Researchers find new method of growing hair

SPRINGFIELD, Massachusetts, Nov 4: Scientists transplanted scalp cells from one person to another, and for the first time ever, grew new hair on a human without the use of drugs, reports AP.

The approach could someday enable just about any head to sprout hair, researchers said.

It also raises hopes of someday spurring the growth of new tissue or even whole organs in side patients, such as cartilage in arthritic joints.

"You can use a few cells to basically regenerate an entire organ. To me, that's the mind-blowing part," said Angela Christiano, a Columbia University baldness researcher who did the genetic analysis for the British experiment, reported in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature.

The researchers, led by biologist Colin Jahoda at Durham University, in England, took cells at the bottom of hair pores -- or follicles -- from Jahoda's own scalp and from a colleague's. These cells from the so-called dermal sheath were then transplanted into the forearm of Jahoda's wife.

Within five weeks, the transplanted tissue -- no bigger than the head of a pin -- made a total of five fully grown hairs in the woman's arm.

The transplanted tissue "is telling the cells of the recipient: You will make a hair follicle," Jahoda said. The new hair was genetically male. It was longer, thicker and darker than arm hair, but it combined some characteristics of both donor and recipient.

Current baldness treatments include hair grafts and certain drugs.

Off the Record

All is fair in love?

SINGAPORE: A love-lorn Singaporean woman's attempt to woo her boyfriend back with 999 roses has landed her in jail, reports AFP.

Former hotel receptionist Pauline Ang, 23, was jailed for six weeks for using a guest's credit card number to settle 1,800 Singapore dollar (1,070 US dollar) bill for the multi-hued bunch of flowers, the Straits Times daily reported Thursday.

The guest refused the transaction when he received his credit card bill, and the trail led back to Ang, now a marketing executive.

"At the time of the offence, she was desperately in love, and besotted with her ex-boyfriend, and in order to win his heart back, she committed the offence," defence counsel Fong Weng Khai said in mitigation.

But the district court judge was unmoved, jailing Ang for six weeks on a charge of cheating the flower shops into thinking her order was genuine.

It was not revealed why she ordered 999 roses but in Chinese culture, the number nine is a homonym for a "long time."

The fussy tiger's dinner

KUALA LUMPUR: A fussy tiger which turned up its nose at a live goat has finally been trapped in northern Malaysia after villagers used a dead sheep as bait, reports said Thursday, reports AFP.

National Parks and Wildlife Department staff had waited in vain for two months for the tiger to take the goat. Three days ago the goat was freed and replaced with the dead sheep near Jeli in Kelantan state.

Local farmers had notified the department after spotting the tiger. It is now headed for Malacca Zoo, which has a care and breeding programme.