

Attack on army camp in Kashmir: 5 killed

SRINAGAR, India, Jan 13: Muslim separatists stormed an army camp during heavy snowfall in the Indian state of Kashmir, sparking a shootout that left five people dead, army officials said today, reports AFP.

The dead included a civilian, an Indian soldier and three militants who raided the complex late Wednesday at Khannabal in Anantnag, some 50 kilometers south of Srinagar. Brigadier Arun Chopra said.

The militants first lobbed a grenade into the camp and then launched a frontal assault, firing at random and killing one army guard instantly.

Soldiers returned fire as the militants barricaded themselves in one particular building.

"This morning we blew up the building in which the three militants had taken shelter," Chopra said. "All three were killed. We have identified two of them as Pakistanis."

"One of them is called Haroon and the other Abdullah. A teenage girl travelling in a jeep on the highway next to the army camp was killed in cross-fire, the officer said.

Muslim militants fighting to end Indian rule in Kashmir have in recent times stepped up attacks on heavily-guarded police and army camps in the state.

Ten security personnel and two Muslim guerrillas were killed last month following a dare-devil attack by the militants on the camp of an elite police unit in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital.

Indian police seize 18000 leopard claws

NEW DELHI, Jan 13: Police in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh have seized 18,000 leopard claws and a large number of animal skins, a newspaper reported Thursday, says AFP.

The seizures, made at a small town in Fatehpur district, included 70 leopard skins, four tiger skins, 220 black buck skins and 132 tiger claws, the Indian Express said. Four men were arrested.

"We suspect that the animals have been poisoned because there are no knife marks on the skins," a wildlife official, R.L. Singh, was quoted as saying.

Singh said 900 leopards would have to be killed to get 18,000 claws.

India is believed to be home to some 5,000 leopards and 3,000 tigers.

Violence subsides in Maluku

JAKARTA, Jan 13: Clashes have subsided between Muslims and Christians in eastern Indonesia's Maluku islands, the military said today, claiming success in stemming the bloodshed which has killed at least 1,700, reports AFP.

"Maluku is safe. Security forces have been able to separate the warring groups," Maluku military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Iwa Budiman told AFP.

"Especially Ambon, you can enjoy life again here," he added. But Budiman said the military was still continuing its search for 450 people still missing after fleeing attacks to the jungles on Buru island.

"Some 350 people have returned with the help of the military and the local people. We'll find the rest, if necessary we can use military airplanes to locate them," he said.

On Wednesday police officers in North Maluku had told AFP fighting was continuing there, but were unable to give casualty figures.

Indonesian military chief Admiral Widodo Adisucipto said in Jakarta Thursday that he thought the security prospects in Maluku were "positive."

"With the hand over of command from the police to the military, troop reinforcements, and consistency in enforcing law, security is already under control," he said.

Pakistan won't permit use of its territory for terrorism

ISLAMABAD, Jan 13: Pakistan yesterday said it will not allow the use of its territory for acts of terrorism, following a US warning over alleged threats by the militant Maulana Masood Azhar, freed recently by India in exchange for hostages aboard a hijacked plane, reports AFP.

Pakistan is opposed to terrorism in all form and it will not allow the misuse of its territory for acts of terrorism, a foreign office statement said.

The US on Thursday last warned Pakistan after Azhar reportedly threatened Indians and Americans and vowed to continue the separatist fight in Jammu and Kashmir.

The government of Pakistan deplores threats of violence against any country or foreign nationals in Pakistan, the foreign office said.

It said incitement or abatement of acts of terrorism, display of firearms, intimidation and threats of injury are offences under the Pakistani penal code.

Anyone who flouts the law is liable to prosecution, the statement added.

Crackdown on opposition leaders in Malaysia 2 arrested on sedition charges

KUALA LUMPUR, Jan 13: The Malaysian government on Thursday ignored international criticism over its latest crackdown on opposition leaders, charging the first one in court with sedition and indicating more arrests were possible, reports AP.

The editor of a leading opposition newspaper, Harakah, and a lawyer for ousted deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim were arrested Wednesday on charges of sedition. A vice president of the opposition National Justice Party was arrested for allegedly provoking racial discord.

If more people commit offences, there will be more arrests, Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told the national news agency Bernama. "But it need not necessarily be all opposition people. Whoever it is, if he commits a wrong, will have to be punished."

Zulkifli Sulong, the editor of the newspaper of the Pan-Malaysia Islamic Party, or PAS, appeared in court Thursday to be charged with sedition for an article in Harakah on Aug. 2, 1999, regarding Anwar's corruption and sodomy trials. The printer of the newspaper was also to be charged with sedition.

The article carried a quote by Chandra Muzaffar, deputy president of the National Justice Party, in which he alleged there was a conspiracy planned by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in which the police, the Attorney General's office, the courts and local media would be used to destroy Anwar.

Sessions Court Judge Abdul Karim Abdul Jalil fixed bail at 5,000 ringgit (\$ 1,315) and set Zulkifli's trial for May 22.

"I am ready to defend myself and I am ready to face the consequences," Zulkifli told the AP after his court hearing. He faces

three years in prison and a fine of 5,000 ringgit (\$ 1,315) if convicted. His newspaper could also be shut down if he is convicted.

On Wednesday, Karpal Singh, who is Anwar's lawyer and a longtime critic of the Mahathir administration, was arrested on charges of sedition for alleging in court last year that someone had tried to poison his client.

Marina Yusoff, a leader of Anwar's National Justice Party, was arrested and charged with "provoking racial discord." She too could face a jail term.

The arrests came as Mahathir left for a two-week vacation in Argentina and the Caribbean.

It was the first crackdown in this Southeast Asian nation since dozens of Anwar supporters were arrested in the aftermath of the popular deputy prime minister's sacking.

Benazir seeks US help to restore democracy

ISLAMABAD, Jan 13: Former prime minister Benazir Bhutto appealed today to US legislators, who will pay a visit to Pakistan, for providing active leadership to return democracy to her homeland, reports AP.

Four democratic senators — Minority Leader Tom Daschle, of south Dakota, Christopher Dodd, of Connecticut, Harry Reid, of Nevada and Daniel Akaka, of Hawaii, are to arrive later Thursday on a two-day visit.

It's not clear who the four men will meet, but US Embassy spokesman Mark Wentworth said the senators will be pressing for a timetable for a return to democracy in Pakistan, something Washington has been demanding since the coup.

In a letter to Daschle, Ms Bhutto suggested Washington tie fresh US financial aid to Pakistan to a commitment and timetable for the army for the return of democracy as well as the release of political prisoners.

"Such a message would clearly convey that in the 21st century democracy, human rights and the rule of law are the values which are respected and upon which lie the dignity

of nations in the global community," Ms Bhutto said in her letter.

Ms Bhutto, who was twice dismissed from power on allegations of widespread corruption, has been convicted of corruption in Pakistan and sentenced in absentia to five years in jail by the deposed government of Nawaz Sharif from her home in Britain. Ms Bhutto initially welcomed the army's takeover and the removal of her arch-rival Sharif.

Gen Pervez Musharraf, the man in charge in Pakistan, has refused to be tied to a deadline to return civilian rule in Pakistan. Instead Musharraf says he wants to implement a series of reforms that would ensure democracy takes root in Pakistan.

Musharraf has accused previous governments, including Ms Bhutto's, of runaway corruption that has weakened most of the country's institutions and left the economy in tatters.

Before setting a date for new elections, Musharraf said he wants new laws, electoral reform, a revived economy and a clean sweep of the corrupt in Pakistan, an ambitious agenda that even his supporters believe will take years.

Meanwhile Ms Bhutto in her letter didn't name the political prisoners she wanted released, but previously she has pressed for the release of her jailed husband, Asif Ali Zardari also convicted on corruption charges. Zardari has been in jail since his wife's government was ousted in 1996.

In one of his first acts after taking power Musharraf established a National Accountability Bureau with sweeping powers and laws to arrest and detain those suspected of corruption as well as those who have not repaid bank loans, a common practice among the wealthy in Pakistan.

Also in her letter to Daschle Ms Bhutto also pressed the legislators to push Pakistan to become the "first South Asian nuclear power to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty," a request that would sit well with the United States which has been appealing to both Pakistan and its nuclear neighbour India to sign the global treaty.

Pakistan already has indicated its willingness to sign, but says that it wants to build a consensus at home and explain the treaty to Pakistanis before signing it.

Russian defence mission travels to Chechnya

MOSCOW, Jan 13: Russian Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo led a senior defence mission into Chechnya on Thursday for the first time since the separatist rebels launched deadly counterattacks last weekend, reports AFP.

"The situation is normal," Rushailo told NTV television on arrival to the main North Caucasus military base Mozdok, near the Chechen border.

He was accompanied by Chief-of-Staff Anatoly Kvashnin and Russia's cabinet pointman on Chechnya, Nikolai Koshman.

NTV said the group may later travel to the Chechen towns of Argun and Shali, both sites of fierce rebel counterattacks that stunned federal forces.

Rushailo played down reports of Russian officials drastically understating their casualties in the battles and vowed to pursue the military campaign to the end.

Media reports about the situation in Chechnya are growing more complicated are grossly exaggerated," Rushailo said.

He added that the Russian commanders would hold a conference after their visit in Chechnya later Thursday to determine how to implement "corrections" in the campaign.

Moscow has admitted to losing at least 37 soldiers in battles for Argun and Shali, where there are still pockets of Chechen resistance.

Rushailo said the fighters would soon be completely wiped out.

There are two ways of dealing with the rebels — either destroy them or make them accountable before the law, which is what we are doing,"

DNA computer

UNDATED, Jan 13: Scientists have created a "DNA computer" from strands of synthetic DNA they coaxed into solving relatively complex calculations, reports AP.

The still-raw chemical computer has no immediate practical applications, but it nudges the fledgling technology of DNA computing further out of world of science fiction and into the realm of the possible, researchers at the University of Wisconsin in Madison said.

"It's kind of a non-automated computer — an abacus of sorts — but it's an approach we're confident can be automated like a conventional computer," said Lloyd Smith, a professor of chemistry.

Conventional computing is driven by computer chips, but that technology is fast approaching the limits of miniaturisation.

Scientists dream of using the vast storage capacity that enables DNA and its chemical cousin RNA to hold the complex blueprints of living organisms. While other researchers have had success with DNA computing, in most of those tests the DNA was suspended in liquid-filled test tubes.

Smith's team, on the other hand, tethered the DNA to a solid surface. That simplified the technology, though it remains too rudimentary to be turned into large DNA computers capable of tackling problems as complex as those solved by conventional computers.

The Wisconsin researchers coded DNA strands to contain all possible solutions to a problem Smith likens to four people each ordering a pizza with four combinations of toppings — a problem with 16 possible answers.

After years of work, his team made several of the computers, each composed of about 100 trillion synthetic DNA strands that repeatedly solved the problem, though with human help.

The findings were published in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature.

Opposition challenges presidential polls in Lanka

COLOMBO, Jan 13: Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party (UNP) has filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging last month's presidential election on grounds it was not free and fair, party officials said today, reports Reuters.

The UNP General Secretary Gamini Athukorala had filed the petition on Wednesday asking for the poll results to be declared void.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga won a second six-year term in the December 21 election with just over 51 per cent of the vote. Her main rival, UNP leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, polled 43 per cent.

The UNP officials said the petition alleged the result was influenced by intimidation of party polling agents and other poll irregularities such as ballot stuffing.

They said the elections department, which is not an independent body, had ordered the printing of fresh postal ballot papers after the deadline for casting postal votes had passed.

The number of ballot papers printed for northern Jaffna was also much higher than the number of voters in the region, the petition said.

Wickremesinghe said soon after the election that polling had been fraught with fraud and violence.

Kumaratunga won the previous 1994 poll with 62 per cent of the vote.

Her second election victory came days after she was wounded in an assassination attempt by a suspected rebel suicide bomber at a campaign rally in the capital Colombo.



Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai (L) and his Japanese counterpart Keizo Obuchi review a Guard of Honour during a welcoming ceremony at the government house in Bangkok. Obuchi arrived in Bangkok yesterday on the final leg of his Southeast Asian tour. —AFP photo

US delaying delivery of military items to S Korea

SEOUL, Jan 13: The United States is delaying the delivery of sensitive torpedo parts to its long-time military ally South Korea for fear of spurring weapons proliferation in the region, officials here said today, reports AFP.

"It seems the delays are closely related to the fruitless US-South Korea missile non-proliferation talks," said a source at a local defence contractor LG Precision Co Ltd.

He said the supply for US-made torpedo guidance-control parts had dried up, but they could be obtained from a European firm.

He disclosed parts of a letter which he said had recently been sent to LG by a US supplier indicating that the supply of such parts could impact on US missile proliferation policy.

It read: (The US company), aware of the priority, is working closely with the MTCR (missile technology control regime) office in an attempt to expedite a release of this export licence."

A senior South Korean defence ministry official who requested anonymity agreed the

delay might result from Washington's scrutiny of those export items in terms of the MTCR.

"Most of the items, now being delayed in shipment, are related to a guidance system," he said.

The ministry official requesting anonymity agreed the delay might result from Washington's scrutiny of those export items in terms of its-backed MTCR policy.

"We are closely watching whether the US export delay was temporary or permanent," said the official engaged in arms procurement affairs.

One of the items, seemingly being restricted includes a "fiber optic inertial measurement unit" which defense contractors confirmed was widely used in the guidance systems of not only torpedoes but also missiles.

US and South Korean negotiators have for years been in a deadlock over Seoul's bid to extend missile ranges from the present 180 kilometres to cope with North Korea's missile threats.

'Tibetan boy happy to be in India'

NEW DELHI, Jan 13: The 14-year-old Tibetan spiritual leader who escaped from China last week, is pleased to be in India but refuses to reveal his future plans, Tibetan solidarity groups who met him said today, reports AFP.

Members of two Indo-Tibetan friendship groups met the Karmapa Rinpoche Wednesday in the northern hill town of Dharamsala, where he arrived January 5 after week-long trek over the Himalayas.

During their brief 10-minute meeting, the groups urged the boy lama who heads one of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, to stay on in India.

"The Karmapa did not reply to our request, but said he was happy to be in India," said Masood Bhat, a Tibetan Muslim exile who was one of 20 delegation members who met the religious leader.

The Karmapa said he saw India as a point of pilgrimage, as a land of many religions and cultures, and the origin of many world religions," Bhat told AFP by telephone from Dharamsala.

"He said a Buddhist he was very happy to come to this land of pilgrimage."

The remarks were the first substantive comments attributed to the Karmapa since his arrival in Dharamsala.

Both Bhat and Karma Dolma, another delegation member, denied a published report Thursday which quoted the Karmapa as saying that he wanted to remain in India, preferably in Dharamsala.

"He did not mention where he would stay. He never touched upon the subject," said Bhat, who also heads the India desk for the Dharamsala-based government-in-exile, which is not recognised by any country.

The Karmapa expressed his gratitude to the delegation members, in particular Indians, for working towards strengthening India-Tibetan relations. He asked us to continue our work."

The Karmapa's defection has placed India in a difficult situation regarding the question of political asylum, with New Delhi having to weigh its traditional support for Tibetan exiles against a desire to improve ties with Beijing.

Cabinet reshuffle in S Korea

SEOUL, Jan 13: Lee Hun-Jai, head of South Korea's powerful financial watchdog, was Thursday named finance and economy minister in a cabinet reshuffle, the presidential Blue House said.

The appointment of the longtime chairman of the Financial Supervisory Commission was seen as entrenching the power of reformists in the government in a bid to breathe new life into the programme of change.

Lee was succeeded by Lee Young-Keun, deputy head of the FSC.

President Kim also appointed former ambassador to Russia Lee Joong-Binn, 62, as minister of foreign affairs and trade to replace incumbent Hong Soon-Young.

The reshuffle, which affected nine ministerial-level posts, was more wide-ranging than was expected ahead of parliamentary polls next April.

"This cabinet reshuffle is aimed at pursuing reform vigorously amid stability," a spokesman for the Blue House said.

The reshuffle also saw Commerce, Industry and Energy Minister Chung Duck-Koo replaced as well as the appointment of a new construction and transportation minister and a new education minister.

Most of the ministers felled in the reshuffle were being freed up from their duties to run in April's elections which the government needs to win if it is to bolster its slim parliamentary majority.

The reshuffle came just hours after parliament endorsed the appointment of legendary industrialist Park Tae-Joon as the country's new prime minister to replace outgoing Kim Jong-Pil.

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Lanka probes bank role in military coup bid

COLOMBO, Jan 13: Sri Lankan police were investigating if a private bank funded the suicide bombing on President Chandrika Kumaratunga as part of a wider conspiracy to stage a military coup, the state media said today, reports AFP.

The government-run Daily News said a loan of 50 million rupees (694,000 dollars) had been given to the wife of a director of the unnamed bank and investigators were checking if the money went to a "terrorist organisation."

The CID (criminal investigations department) is investigating whether the Tigers (the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) had received millions of rupees from banks owned by some billionaire businessmen and whether such funds have been utilised for the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate her (President Kumaratunga) on December 18, 1999," the Daily News said.

It quoted police sources as saying that the unnamed bank's own regulations had been violated in granting the loan.

There was no immediate reaction from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka which is supposed to supervise commercial banks to ensure they do not over extend themselves to a single individual or a company.

The Daily News which has been reporting on a wider conspiracy to stage a military coup following the attempt on Kumaratunga's life on December 18 said the questioning of an ethnic Tamil woman has prompted the probe on the bank's role in the conspiracy.

On Wednesday, the Daily News said the head of a state media organisation was also questioned by police.

The main opposition United National Party (UNP) has accused the government of "fabricating evidence" to show a link between the assassination attempt and an alleged coup to form a military administration.

"We have all condemned the assassination attempt which the government itself said was the work of a Tiger suicide bomber," opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe told reporters here.

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BRIEFLY

5 drug dealers shot dead: Five Nigerian citizens suspected of being members of an international drug trafficking cartel were shot dead during a police raid in the Indonesian capital, reports said Thursday, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The five victims, all of whom were male Nigerian citizens, were shot and killed during the raid Wednesday evening on a rented house in south Jakarta, the daily Media Indonesia reported.

Philippines-US wargames: US troops and their Philippine allies are to launch month-long joint military exercises in Manila on January 28, the first since bilateral ties soured four years ago, AFP reports from Manila.

The Philippine military said the exercises involved just under 1,000 American troops and about a thousand Filipino soldiers, with the bulk of maneuvers to be held between February 21 and March 3.