

Another Israeli diplomat shot in Jordan

AMMAN, Dec 6: Israel today prepared to send home "unnecessary" embassy staff and their family members a day after a gunman shot and wounded a diplomat at its Amman mission, an embassy spokesman said, reports AFP.

"Unnecessary staff (and family members) will be sent to Israel for the coming days," Roy Gilad told AFP, confirming an Israeli army radio report.

The wounded diplomat, Shlomo Razabi, was also due to be flown home Wednesday after undergoing surgery for broken bones in the foot caused by a bullet wound, at the Amman Arab Heart Centre, he said.

Razabi, an administrative employee with diplomatic status, was shot and wounded Tuesday evening by one or more unidentified gunmen as he drove his car with his wife and another Israeli diplomat in western Amman, Gilad said.

He is the second Israeli diplomat in Amman to be attacked in two weeks and both shootings have been claimed in Beirut by the underground Islamic group, the Movement for the Struggle of the Jordanian Islamic Resistance.

The same group had claimed responsibility in 1997 for firing shots at a car carrying guards for the Israeli embassy in Amman, wounding them.

Sharif suffers from chest pain

LAHORE, Dec 6: Pakistan's jailed ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif is suffering from chest pain that worsened yesterday, his daughter Maryam Safdar said, reports BSS.

Safdar told Reuters in Lahore by telephone that her mother had reported after a visit yesterday that her husband, who will be 51 on December 25, had complained of the chest pain for the past two days.

"My father's chest pain increased today," Safdar said.

There was no immediate information about the cause of the pain, but Safdar said a family doctor had visited and recommended the former prime minister receive "specialised treatment" by a cardiologist.

She also said that an electrocardiogram performed by a team of army doctors had not been normal. "These reports are very disturbing for the entire family," Safdar said.

Rocket attack kills soldier in Pakistan

QUETTA, Pakistan, Dec 6: A Pakistani soldier was killed and three people were injured late Tuesday as five rockets slammed a military area in the southwestern city of Quetta, police said, reports AFP.

The rockets fired from the Koh-i-Murad hills overlooking Quetta targeted two military checkpoints, injuring two soldiers. One of the wounded soldiers died on his way to hospital, police said.

The rockets also hit a house in the same district, injuring two civilians, they said.

Officials said they were investigating the attack. No arrests have been reported.

At least 17 rockets were fired from the same hills about three months ago. No casualties were reported as the rockets in the previous attack landed in unpopulated areas.

Tuesday's attack was the first since the military police recently set up special check posts on the hills.

Besides the rocket attacks for which no one has claimed responsibility, Quetta has also been rocked by around 20 bomb blasts in the past few months.

World's largest cable TV network

SHANGHAI, Dec 6: China's largest industrial and commercial center of Shanghai has finished setting up an interactive wide-band cable TV network for one million users, the largest city cable network in the world, according to the Shanghai Information Office, reports Xinhua.

The city already possesses the world's largest cable TV network with 3.2 million users. The Shanghai Municipal Government plans to make the present network entirely interactive within 3 years, providing users faster, cheaper and better access to Internet and voice transmission services.

The project will help Shanghai realise the integration of cable TV, fixed telephone and data networks.

An interactive network will improve the quality and safety of information transmission via the Internet, while also greatly increasing the transmission capacity and therefore, paving the way for future broadcasting of high definition TV signals.

The Shanghai Cable Network Co. Ltd., which is undertaking the project, has initiated services based on the new network, such as high-speed access to the Internet, on-line share trading, interactive TV, on-line video programming, on-line education, on-line medical services, e-commerce and intelligent residential community.

China declines to take part in naval exercises sponsored by India

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: China has declined to participate in an international naval exercise India plans to hold in February next year in the Arabian Sea, officials said here today, reports AFP.

An Indian defence ministry spokesman, however, insisted that Beijing's decision should not be taken as a snub to India's efforts put together the International Fleet Review.

India last week had said 70 warships, including a French nuclear submarine and naval vessels from Britain and the United States, would sail into Indian waters for the five-day exercises off Bombay.

India has not invited arch-rival Pakistan to the exercises.

The defence ministry spokesman said news reports of China having "backed out" of the exercise were unfounded.

"General invitations were sent out to many countries. There is no question of China backing out... They have just expressed their inability to participate," the spokesman said.

"It was a general invitation and newspapers, by actually printing it, have shown it as a snub but it is not," he said of the Chinese refusal, which was received by the Indian naval headquarters on Monday.

Officials at the Chinese embassy here were not immediately available for comment.

The spokesman also shrugged off recent Chinese protests over Indian naval manoeuvres in the South China Sea as routine and said

they were not connected with the September 15-19 "goodwill visit" to Shanghai by two Indian warships.

"The goodwill visit was very welcome and in fact our ships received a red carpet treatment by the Chinese but the exercises received mild protest," he said.

"These kind of protests are normal. These things are done so no one can lay a permanent claim on the other's territory."

Relations between India and China have always been difficult and the two countries fought a bloody two-month war in 1962.

Ties plummeted following India's nuclear tests in 1998, but have since undergone something of a thaw with a series of high-level visits.

New Delhi, however, is wary of China's support to Pakistan, which has fought three wars with India since the subcontinent's independence from Britain in 1947.

China too keeps a wary eye on the Indian Navy's ambitions of expanding its reach in the Indian Ocean.

The navy here last week said it will commission a destroyer and eight other warships next year, as well as four Russian-built spy planes, and will not give up its options of possessing nuclear-powered submarines.

India is also in the process of acquiring an aircraft carrier from its closest military ally, Russia.

Florida Supreme Court agrees to hear Gore appeal

TALLAHASSEE, Dec 6: Florida Supreme Court kept the presidential race on the legal fast track, agreeing to speedily hear Al Gore's appeal of a ruling awarding George W. Bush the state's 25 electoral votes, reports AP.

The arguments were scheduled for Thursday morning, the latest legal twist among many in the month since the presidential election left Bush leading by a slim margin among 6 million votes cast in the pivotal state.

Gore wants to reverse a devastating defeat Monday, when Circuit Judge N. Sanders Sauls rejected every argument Gore presented for why a state certified 537-vote victory for Bush should be nullified.

Sauls concluded Gore had not proven the results of the election would change even if his legal arguments won out and the court conducted hand recounts of 14,000 disputed ballots in Miami-Dade and Palm Beach counties.

To win an appeal, Gore must show a reasonable probability that recounts would tip the election to him and that county boards abused their discretion.

Encouraging to Democrats was their return to a state appeals court that provided their greatest legal

victory to date, a decision last month extending by a week the date by which counties could conduct hand counts.

After the extension failed to put Gore ahead, he challenged the certified Florida results in court, forcing a marathon weekend trial capped by Sauls' dramatic announcement from the bench Monday.

Sauls rejected Gore's request for a manual recount in two counties and to overturn Bush's victory in the state that stands to pick the next president when it formally awards its electoral votes.

Florida Supreme Court spokesman Craig Waters said Tuesday that the justices had allotted an hour Thursday for oral arguments, 30 minutes apiece. On a technical point of what issues would be argued, he said lawyers would discuss whether the court should decide the case as well as the issues.

"The court could still reject the case, uphold Sauls' ruling or reverse all or part of it, returning it to the lower court with further instructions."

Joseph Lieberman, Gore's vice presidential candidate, said the Florida Supreme Court would be "the final arbiter" of the election dispute.

Gore himself said he didn't feel "anything other than optimistic."

CIA briefs Bush

AUSTIN, Texas, Dec 6: Lacking "a clear verdict" a month after the presidential election, Republican George W. Bush yesterday inched closer to the White House with his first regular CIA briefing and work on a potential transition, reports Reuters.

"Had a good briefing this morning," the Texas governor told reporters on his way to the state capitol. "I appreciate the (Clinton) administration's willingness to send a member of the intelligence community over to give me a security briefing."

As he has for much of the past month, Bush yesterday tried on the mantle of president-elect despite the protracted uncertainty over whether he or Democrat Al Gore won Nov. 7 election.

Bush expressed confidence that he would prevail and be sworn as the 43rd US president on Jan. 20, saying he could not imagine any other scenario.

"Not really, but until there's finality call me governor," he said on the CBS programme.

Hillary assumes new role as US senator

WASHINGTON, Dec 6: US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton assumed her new role as US senator Tuesday, going to meetings and attending an exclusive dinner for members of the incoming Senate, accompanied by her husband, US President Bill Clinton, reports AFP.

"It probably is his first official event as the spouse of the senator-elect," White House spokesman Jake Siewert said of the president's appearance at the dinner, held at the US Supreme Court and hosted by Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott.

In the coming months, Siewert added, the US commander in chief "is looking forward to heading out into the private sector and earning a living and supporting, as he said, the new senator and the family."

On November 7, the 53-year-old first lady soundly defeated her Republican rival Rick Lazio in New York, becoming one of 13 women in the 100-member upper chamber of the US Congress. One of nine new Democrats

Factory gas leak in Calcutta

CALCUTTA, India, Dec 6: Calcutta police fought pitched battles with environmentalists after 25 people were hospitalised following a leak of toxic gas from a tanker, officials said today, reports AFP.

The fire department said 25 people, including 10 children, were rushed to hospital when ammonia gas leaked from a tanker belonging to a meat-processing factory late Tuesday in Calcutta's Howrah district.

Angered by the leakage, some 2,000 protesters and environmentalists picketed the factory and clashed with police.

Madanlal Pahava dead

MUMBAI, Dec 6: Madanlal Pahava, who was incarcerated for 18 years for his involvement in the Mahatma Gandhi assassination case, died here today, family sources said, reports PTI.

Pahava died at a private hospital, where he was admitted around a week ago, source said.

The seventy-four-year-old Hindu Zealot was undergoing dialysis for last eight years.

Pahava was born in Pakpattan village in Montgomery district in Pakistan and migrated to India after partition.

He had been entrusted with carrying out a crude bomb explosion at the site of Gandhi's religious prayer meeting when the Mahatma was gunned down by Nathuram Godse.

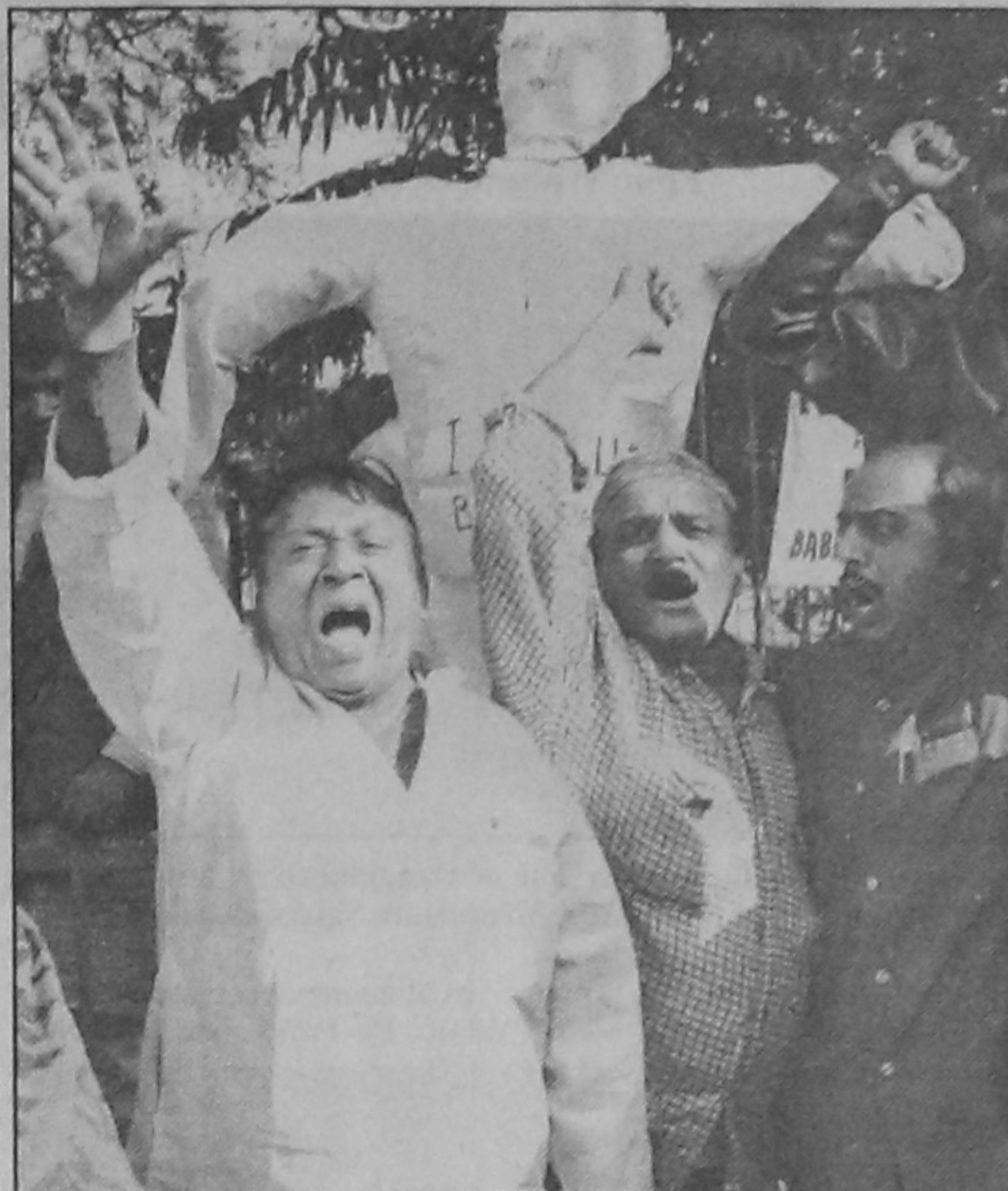
He was nabbed at the site along with Nathuram, his brother Gopal Godse, Narayan Apte and Vishupant Karkare.

While Nathuram and Apte were hanged to death the other three were sentenced to life imprisonment.

Pahava was lodged in Ambala prison at Pherozepore in Punjab. He did his MA in Hindi from the jail.

After his release from the jail in 1964, he went on to marry Manjiri, who also took part in the movement for unified Maharashtra. He leaves behind his wife.

After spending some time with Gopal Godse in Pune, Pahava settled in the metropolis and practised labour law and became a labour contractor later.



Indian Muslim activists shout anti-government slogans and demand the rebuilding of the Babri Mosque during a demonstration near Parliament in New Delhi yesterday on the eighth anniversary of the razing of the mosque in Ayodhya, in northern Uttar Pradesh state.

--AFP photo

US asks China to release Falungong member

WASHINGTON, Dec 6: The United States on Tuesday called on China to release a US resident and Falungong practitioner jailed for documenting alleged abuses against the banned spiritual movement, reports AFP.

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said a secret one-day trial of Teng Chunyan last month on espionage charges was "deeply disturbing."

"We urge the Chinese authorities to release Ms. Teng and to permit her to return to the United States," Boucher told reporters.

"We have raised this case with Chinese authorities, both in Beijing and in Washington," Boucher said, urging China to end a crackdown on Falungong and to uphold the internationally recognised right of citizens to take part in "peaceful spiritual pursuits."

Although Teng is a US resident, she is not a US citizen and as such has no right of consular access, Boucher said.

Teng, 37, an acupuncturist who lives in New York, was held on charges of "proving into state intelligence for overseas organisations" at the Beijing Intermediate People's Court.

Malaysian opposition leader may face sedition charge

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 6: A Malaysian opposition party official may be charged with sedition over his alleged involvement in a campaign to discredit Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad overseas, a minister said today, reports AFP.

Police have completed their inquiry into Mohamad Ezam Mohamed Nor and have submitted their findings to the attorney-general, deputy home minister Zainal Abidin Zin said.

"The attorney-general's chambers will decide whether Ezam can be taken to court under the Sedition Act," he was quoted by the national news agency Bernama as telling parliament.

Sedition is punishable by up to three years in jail or a fine or both.

Mahathir has said that Malaysians who criticise their leaders while overseas are guilty of treason because they could deter foreign investors.

Ezam is the youth chief of the National Justice Party (Keadilan), founded by the wife of jailed former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim.

He is already on trial under the Official Secrets Act for allegedly leaking secret reports of Anti-Corruption Agency investigations into two leading ruling party figures.

This offence is punishable by at least one year in jail and a maximum of seven.

Ezam admitted in October that he had criticised Mahathir in the United States and Europe over Anwar's case.

He told AFP at the time that he met aides to powerful Republican Senator Jesse Helms and members of the conservative Heritage Foundation during a US trip to solicit support for Anwar.

But he said he was not seeking trade sanctions against Malaysia since these would be counter-productive.

Zainal said the government viewed seriously the actions of certain groups to discredit the country's leaders. He did not name any group but said police and foreign ministry officials were monitoring speeches they made locally or overseas.

Appeals court suspends arrest order for Pinochet

SANTIAGO, Dec 6: The Santiago Appeals Court on Tuesday suspended the house arrest order for Augusto Pinochet issued December 1 by the judge investigating human rights abuses during his dictatorship, court sources said, reports AFP.

Attorneys for Pinochet, 85, submitted their appeal late Monday, the sources said.

President Ricardo Lagos was due to meet with military leaders on Tuesday to discuss the trial of Pinochet, but was not expected to convene the National Security Council, Interior Minister Jose Miguel Insulza said Monday.

Following hastily-called meetings with his counterparts in Chile's navy, air force and customs office, Army commander-in-chief General Ricardo Izurieta had proposed that the National Security Council be convened to discuss the situation.

Last Friday, Judge Juan Guzman ordered the former dictator be placed under house arrest for his role as the "intellectual author" of the 1973 series of kidnappings and murders of 75 political opponents

known as the "caravan of death."

Pinochet's attorney, Sergio Castro, said the legal team's appeal was aimed in part at ensuring that Pinochet not be confined to his home in Santiago. Since last week, Pinochet has been staying at his country home southwest of the capital, near the Pacific coast.

The Santiago Appeals Court's hold on the house arrest order is to remain in effect until the same court rules on a motion filed by Pinochet's attorneys to dismiss the entire case against him. The court is expected to hand down its ruling by Thursday.

If that motion is rejected, Pinochet's house arrest and the process of notifying him of the charges against him would take immediate and indefinite effect, as set out in Guzman's order.

The general's attorneys maintain Guzman's order was illegal, insisting that before handing it down he should have interrogated Pinochet, and mental health exams of the general which Guzman himself ordered should have been carried out.

Iranian students decry conservatives

TEHRAN, Dec 6: Thousands of Iranian students today voiced their anger with the regime's conservative leaders and hailed reformist President Mohammad Khatami when he arrived to address them on the annual Students Day, reports AFP.

"Shahrdadi, resign, resign," between 6,000 and 7,000 students at Tehran University, cried referring to the country's judiciary chief, Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi.

The students, whose cries intensified with the arrival of Khatami on campus, also demanded the release of "political prisoners."

"Khatami, Khatami, our next president!" the students chanted as the head of state, a hero to the young, said that Iran was determined to "follow the path of democracy and a peoples' government."

During his speech, which was frequently interrupted by cheers from the audience, the president underlined that the Iranian people shared his "hope for democracy and a respect for freedom."

"All of this can be realised if we all respect the constitution," Khatami asserted, deploring the "non-application of certain articles and chapters of the basic law."

His words were welcomed by cries of "Death to the Taliban," by students comparing Iran's ultra-conservative Shiite clergy to the strict Afghan Islamic regime.

They also lashed out against Ali Larijani, the head of the conservative-run state television and radio, as well as two leading conservative papers.

The Students Day was established in 1953 after riots broke out between police of the shah's regime and students opposing a scheduled visit by then US vice president Richard Nixon. Several students were killed in the clashes.

An ongoing power-struggle between the country's conservatives and reformers has intensified in recent months, with reformists accusing conservatives of aiming to limit Khatami's powers.

Khatami, whose four-year term comes to an end in May, in November admitted that he was "incapable" of enforcing the constitution and took subtle but clear aim at conservatives who have stymied his reforms.

Conservative courts here have closed most pro-reform newspapers since reformists won parliamentary elections in February, while many journalists and Khatami allies have been jailed or are on trial.

Asked in November if he would run for a second term, Khatami said: "It is too soon for that."

Some aides have suggested he may not run for reelection because of the wide-ranging powers of the conservatives, who in addition to the courts control state media, the police and army, and key economic sectors.

Anarchy grips Manipur

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: A secret report sent to India's prime minister describes a state of anarchy in the northeastern state of Manipur, where militants move freely in government offices and most police stations have been abandoned, reports Reuters.

The Pioneer newspaper said today that, according to the Home (Interior) Ministry report, "the writ of the extremists is more effective than that of the administration" in the mountainous state.

It said militants from the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur have entered the state secretariat and walked away with classified documents, civil servants are sitting at home and senior police officials have to bribe militants to get back weapons.

The PLA is leading a three-decade-old battle to win independence for the mostly tribal population of 2.6 million people. It accuses the federal government of neglecting the state, one of seven northeastern states where dozens of groups are fighting for separate homelands or fighting each other in tribal wars.

The Pioneer said 22 members of the state legislative assembly had been hiding at the chief minister's house in the state capital, Imphal, for the past three days.

It quoted the report as saying that "militants are able to move freely within the secretariat and government offices, with the security forces not taking any action."

It said that only 18 of the state's 57 police stations are functional. Most have been abandoned following extremist attacks.

The worst-affected districts are Thoubal and Chandel, where the administration is almost non-existent and hundreds of armed militants freely roam the streets," it added.

The daily said government officers who try to resist the militants are shot dead or attacked, and cited the case of a registrar of cooperative societies who was sprayed with bullets for refusing to obey orders from extremists.

It said militants had also called for a ban on Hindi-language films and programmes on satellite television channels, and had seized Hindi-language film cassettes from video stores.

Four killed in landmine blast in Lanka

COLOMBO, Dec 6: Tamil Tiger guerrillas set off a powerful landmine in eastern Sri Lanka today, killing four bus passengers and wounding 21 others, local officials said, reports AFP.

The Claymore-type bomb was aimed at a bus near the town of Batticaloa, military spokesman Sanath Karunaratne said.

"Among the wounded are three Sinhalese doctors who were travelling in the bus," Karunaratne added.

Local officials said the bus careered off into a lagoon after the blast.

The attack was the second against a bus in Sri Lanka since the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were accused of blowing up a bus on November 28, killing seven passengers.

AFI announces new film awards

LOS ANGELES, Dec 6: The American Film Institute launched a new annual award Tuesday designed to recognise and preserve film accomplishments, reports AFP.

"AFI 2000, Honouring a Year of Excellence" will honour "AFI Movies of the Year" and "AFI Moments of Significance," and will be kicked off with this year's winners to be announced January 9, the Institute said.

The awards will boost AFI's efforts to advance, document and preserve film, television and other forms of the moving image from a historical perspective, said institute head Jean Picker Firstenberg.

In January AFI will announce a jury's list of the 10 most outstanding American films from 2000 "that best advanced the art of the moving image... (and) inspired audiences and artists alike or made a mark on American society in matter of style or substance," Firstenberg said.

Jurors may nominate films and worthy "moments" as well as reference material submitted by AFI historians, board members and others.

US, S Korea hold talks on wartime massacre

SEOUL, Dec 6: US and South Korean officials held talks today on an alleged massacre of Korean civilians by US troops during the 1950-53 Korean War, with press reports mounting on Washington for an apology, reports AFP.

The one-day session, held at a war memorial hall in central Seoul, was aimed at coordinating and finalising the results of separate probes into the 1950 incident, South Korean officials said.

The talks continued till late in the evening, Yu Hyung-Suk of Prime Minister's Office in Seoul said, adding there will be a briefing on the outcomes Thursday.

But chances of reaching a conclusion remained slim. "We expect little from today's

talks," another Seoul official told AFP, while asking for anonymity, at the start of the talks.

He did not elaborate, but reports said Seoul and Washington were at odds over key parts of the inquiry, including whether a premeditated order had been made to shoot to death the Korean civilian refugees.

US and South Korean military officials have held their own investigations into the incidents at No Gun Ri, 214 km south of Seoul, over three days around July 26, 1950.

US troops were alleged to have gunned down civilians fleeing the North Korean army. South Korean accounts have said hundreds were killed.