

Two Shi'ite activists killed in Karachi

AP, Karachi

Gunmen on a motorcycle shot and killed two Shiite Muslims Monday night in the troubled port city of Karachi, wracked by religiously motivated violence said police.

No one took responsibility for the drive-by shooting that left Muzaffar Ali, treasurer of Tehrik-e-Kafria Pakistan or Organization for Shiite Law in Pakistan, and his friend Nazeer Abbas dead.

The two men were sitting outside their apartment complex in a central neighborhood when the gunmen rode by opening fire with automatic rifles, said police.

The killings came one week after four Sunni Muslims were gunned down in Karachi in a massacre on a main boulevard that resulted in violent demonstrations and retaliatory killings.

N Korean patrol boat crosses into S Korean waters

AFP, Seoul

South Korean navy speed boats confronted a North Korean patrol vessel that crossed into South Korean waters, a military spokesman said Tuesday.

The three South Korean vessels confronted the North Korean boat which spent 38 minutes on the southern side of the unofficial sea frontier late Monday, said a spokesman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The incident happened near the island of Paekryong off the west coast of the Korean peninsula, which has been the venue for previous border clashes. The waters around the island are claimed by the communist North but have been controlled by the South since the 1950-53 Korean War.

US teacher stabbed to death in China

AP, Beijing

An American university teacher was stabbed to death at a Christian youth meeting in central China by an attacker police described as emotionally disturbed, the US Embassy said Tuesday.

Bruce Emerson Morrison, an instructor at the Hubei Institute of Technology in Wuhan city, was attending the meeting Saturday afternoon when he was stabbed in the stomach, said the embassy. He died later Saturday after being taken to a Wuhan hospital, a local newspaper, the Changjiang Daily, reported Sunday.

The embassy said Morrison was a 37-year-old native of New Orleans, Louisiana. An embassy spokesman, citing privacy rules, refused to provide other details about Morrison and whether he had any family in China.

Morrison's alleged attacker, Gong Zhili, was being held by police, who called him a "known schizophrenic," the embassy said. The Changjiang Daily reported that Gong was a Christian. It was not known if the two men knew each other.

Israelis set to sweep Sharon to power

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel was set Tuesday to sweep hawkish Ariel Sharon to a crushing victory in an election seen as a referendum on peace after the worst bloodletting in the region in years, but a brave-faced Ehud Barak insisted the race was not yet lost.

"People who were angry at me are now realising what is the real alternative, and they are coming back in tens of thousands every hour," the 58-year-old Barak told reporters as he prepared to cast his ballot near his home northeast of Tel Aviv.

The former army chief, his government crippled by the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, now in its fifth month, said the election was a stark choice between peace and war.

Polling stations are scheduled to remain open until 10:00 pm (0200 BST Wednesday), with initial television projections from exit polls due right after they close.

At 10 am three hours after voting began, Israeli public radio said the turnout rate was 11 percent of the some 4.5 million eligible voters, down four percentage points on the May 1999 election that swept Barak into office.

Israel stationed 15,000 police throughout the country to ensure calm and

sealed off the Palestinian territories amid warnings of possible terror attacks and calls by Palestinian groups for a "day of rage."

But by mid-morning, there were no reports of violence despite isolated shooting incidents overnight.

In a stunning comeback for a man written off over the Lebanon war 18 years ago, opinion polls show Sharon, the 72-year-old former general nicknamed the "Bulldozer," winning by a landslide.

A survey in the Jerusalem Post newspaper gave the Likud party leader a thundering 27-point lead over Barak, who forced the election with his December resignation to seek a new mandate for peace but has trailed badly from the start of the campaign.

In an article in the Maariv newspaper, Sharon reiterated his calls for peace, but only with security, and said he would seek to form a government of national unity "open to any Zionist party."

"There are not two camps in Israel, one of peace-lovers and one of warmongers. We all want to end the bloody confrontation which has been tearing this country apart for 120 years," he wrote.

It is the third election in just five years for Israelis but the first time in their history they have gone to the polls to choose a prime minister without a parallel parliamentary election.



Israeli caretaker Prime Minister Ehud Barak waves to the crowd before casting his vote near his home in Kokhav Yair yesterday. As Israelis started to vote in a special election for prime minister, Barak called on his country's voters to reject the "extremism" that, in his view, characterises his rival right-wing candidate, Ariel Sharon.

Pak court asks military regime to set out election plans

AFP, Islamabad

The Pakistan Supreme Court Tuesday asked the military regime to clarify its plans to hold general elections as it heard a petition against the 1999 coup, court officials said.

Chief justice Irshad Hassan Khan told state attorney Sharifuddin Pirzada to "seek instructions" on the restoration of democracy during opening arguments in the hearing.

"Seek instructions from the government when you are going to hold elections and restore democ-

racy," he said.

The petition, filed by members of the suspended parliament, asks for a review of the May 12, 2000, supreme court ruling which validated the coup.

The court has given military ruler General Pervez Musharraf three years from the night of the October 12, 1999 takeover to complete his reforms and revive democracy with general elections.

Musharraf jailed prime minister Nawaz Sharif, disbanded parliament and suspended the 1973 constitution, arguing the country

was being wrecked by rampant corruption.

Sharif was pardoned of lengthy jail terms for hijacking and tax evasion in December last year and exiled to Saudi Arabia.

In his review petition before a full bench of 11 judges, former senate chairman Wasim Sajjad said the principle of state necessity was wrongly implied in the supreme court's earlier ruling.

"The period of three years granted for the return of constitutional rule is the result of an obvious mistake," he said.

"This period should be curtailed to the minimum. Either the assemblies should be restored or elections should be held."

The situation did not warrant army intervention and the court should not have validated the takeover, Sajjad said.

Musharraf has said he will abide by the court's deadline for democracy but has yet to fix an election timeframe despite pressure from the United States and Europe.

The hearing will resume on Wednesday.

Chinese ferry arrives in Taiwan on landmark trip

AFP, Kinmen, Taiwan

A Chinese ferry arrived here yesterday on the first official direct sailing from the mainland to Taiwan since a bloody civil war separated the two sides more than 50 years ago.

The Gulangyu ferry, carrying some 90 people, sailed in to a warm welcome from dragon dancers, bands and some 200 residents at Liaclo harbour after the two-hour voyage from Xiamen in China's southeastern province of Fujian.

Among the passengers were 76 mainland citizens born in Kinmen — an island a few kilometres off China's southeastern coast and controlled by Taiwan — who had been separated from

their families since the civil war ended in 1949.

The visitors, smiling broadly, were embraced by their relatives as firecrackers exploded to mark the occasion.

"It's been ... more than 60 years," one passenger murmured emotionally. In tears, Hung Youli kissed the ground of her native home which she left decades ago.

The elders, accompanied by 10 mainland officials and six journalists, were invited for the four-day trip by the Kinmen Senior Citizens Association.

They will tour scenic spots on Kinmen, pay respects to their ancestors at shrines and join relatives before returning Friday.

Also welcoming the visitors were

Kinmen magistrate Chen Shui-tsai and Teng Chen-chung, vice-chairman of the Mainland Affairs Council which charts Taiwan's China policy.

"Allowing them to come for the visit showed the goodwill of the mainland ... (The goodwill) will help push for more exchanges between the people and development of the mini-links," Teng told AFP.

"This is my first trip home," said an excited Wang Jiahua, 69.

Wang left the islet for Southeast Asia when he was just three years old with his parents in search of a better life.

The Wangs later moved to Fujian, but then found themselves barred from returning to their homeland when an iron curtain descended over the Taiwan Strait.



US President George W. Bush (R) meets with Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien (L) in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, DC, on Monday.

Estrada challenges legitimacy of Arroyo

AFP, Manila

Deposed Philippine President Joseph Estrada filed a landmark suit in the Supreme Court on Tuesday challenging the legitimacy of his successor Gloria Arroyo.

Former movie star Estrada asked the court to declare him the "lawful and incumbent" president and Arroyo as "acting" president, 17 days after he was removed by a military-backed popular uprising.

The court made no immediate comment on the petition, which critics dismissed as a transparent ploy by Estrada to gain a bargaining chip by which to avoid a possible jail term for alleged corruption.

The former president suffered a setback Tuesday in a related case, when the Supreme Court refused to stop a corruption probe against him.

The court also dismissed four suits from private citizens who had asked the body to rule on the legality of the Arroyo presidency.

It ruled the petitioners had failed to show "any prima facie interest to qualify them as proper parties" in the political dispute, the court clerk said.

The court also decided to hear oral arguments next week on an Estrada suit against Aniano Desierto, the special state prosecutor who had launched the corruption investigation.

Arroyo's office announced she would name a vice president later Tuesday.

MPs step up moves to unseat Wahid

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian MPs were Tuesday intensifying efforts to unseat President Abdurrahman Wahid, gathering signatures to demand a fast-tracked special session of parliament and consulting with constitutional lawyers, key legislators said.

"We are in the process of getting MPs to sign a petition asking that the process for holding a special session be accelerated," Ali Marwan Hanan, United Development Party (PPP) secretary-general, told AFP.

Hanan's party, part of a loose coalition of Islamic parties firmly opposed to Wahid, last week called for an immediate special session of the parliament, at which Wahid could be impeached over two financial scandals he has been linked to. The PPP's push was overruled at the time, with the majority of MPs opting to reprimand Wahid with a censure motion instead.

The censure, according to the constitution, gives Wahid up to four

months to respond, before a special impeachment session of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) can be held.

Hanan said however that support was growing for a fast-tracked special session, given the "eruption of riots in several areas" by Wahid supporters, and the specter of ongoing political uncertainty.

"We're hoping to get at least 393 signatures (more than half the members of the MPR), based on the number of MPs who voted last week to endorse the report," Hanan said.

He was referring to the lower house of parliament's endorsement of a report by a 50-member parliamentary commission which linked Wahid to the scandals.

The report concluded the president "could be suspected" of involvement in the embezzlement of almost four million dollars of state funds, and of misleading the public over a two million dollar donation from the Sultan of Brunei.

Pak minister to visit Afghanistan

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider will visit Afghanistan today for crucial talks with the ruling Taliban militia expected to focus on UN sanctions, refugees and alleged terrorism.

Haider said heavy snow in the Afghan capital Kabul forced him to delay his two-day trip last week "but now I will visit Afghanistan on Wednesday."

"All the matters of mutual concern between the two countries as well as concerns of the world will be discussed with the Afghan government," the state run Associated Press of Pakistan reported.

The visit will be the first by a high-level Pakistani delegation since military ruler General Pervez Musharraf seized power in a coup in October 1999.

Pakistan is the fundamentalist Taliban's closest ally and one of only three countries that recognises its unique brand of Islamic rule.

The United Nations last month broadened its sanctions on the Taliban for their refusal to hand over indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden and close alleged terrorist training camps.

Taliban dismiss report on Laden

AFP, Islamabad

The Afghan foreign minister Tuesday dismissed a report in a British daily that the Taliban militia was ready to hand over indicted terrorist Osama bin Laden in exchange for international recognition.

Foreign Minister Wakil Ahmad Mutawakeel told the Pakistan-based Afghan Islamic Press that Monday's report in The Times was a "total lie." "I have never said this to any reporter. There is no change in the Taliban's policy on Osama," he told the private agency.

The Times quoted the foreign minister as saying the ruling Islamic militia was ready to hand over bin Laden to a third country if it was given recognition as the country's legitimate government.

Trial of 4 suspects in US embassy bombings opens

AFP, New York

The high-profile trial of four defendants linked to accused terrorist Osama Bin Laden for their role in the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania opened here Monday.

The four men are charged with the deaths of 12 US nationals who were among 224 killed in near-simultaneous explosions on August 7, 1998 at the US embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

All four, believed to be members of a militant Islamic group led by Saudi dissident bin Laden, have pleaded innocent.

Assistant US attorney Paul Butler's opening remarks focused on setting the scene for the 18 jury volunteers — 12 members and six alternates — as well as linking the bombings to bin Laden.

"On August 7, 1998, it's business as usual in the American embassy in Nairobi, Kenya," Butler started off. "In the blink of an eye, everything

changes. A truck enters the parking lot of the embassy, in the trunk of this truck was a powerful bomb."

"Kenya, Tanzania and the United States will never be the same," Butler said. "And for that, this trial seeks justice."

Butler said the prosecution intends to introduce a surprise witness as well as confessions by one of the accused to bolster their case.

Defence lawyers have tried in vain to discover the identity of the surprise witness, entered in court records under the code name "CS-1," and who could take the stand as early as Tuesday.

Butler added that he intends to bolster the government case with confessions by at least one of the accused obtained while under detention in Kenya.

Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda organisation is an extensive network which the United States alleges has funded terrorist attacks around the world.