

## Sunil Dutt hurt as plane makes crash-landing

AFP, Bombay

Indian movie star-turned-politician Sunil Dutt and five others were slightly injured when their plane was forced to make a crash-landing near Bombay, police said Tuesday.

The twin-engine Piper Apache aircraft in which Dutt and the others were travelling, crash-landed following engine failure late Monday in a field near the town of Nashik -- about 180 km east of Bombay.

Officials at the Nashik police control room identified the others on the plane as pilot Sunil Hande and passengers Neha Patel, 19, Snehal Patel, 16, Disha Patel, 13, and Purnima Naik, 40.

"Villagers saw the plane crashing-landing with navigation lights on. They reached the spot and pulled out the passengers and pilot and admitted them to the Lifeline Hospital," said a police spokesman.

Police said Dutt, a Congress MP from Bombay, was injured on his knees, while his co-passengers received cuts and bruises. The pilot was injured on his face and hands.

## Bus crash kills 13 in Nepal

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A bus packed with Nepali villagers ran off a mountain road killing 13 people, police said yesterday.

The accident happened on Monday at Kharjyang, about 380 km (240 miles) west of the Himalayan kingdom's capital, Kathmandu.

Six people were killed immediately and seven died in hospital, police said. Nineteen people were in critical condition.

# 58 boys burned alive in school dormitory in Kenya

AFP, Machakos, Kenya

Some 58 boys died Monday, burned beyond recognition in a school blaze in southeastern Kenya which police said was probably started deliberately. At least one, and, according to several reports, both of the crowded room's doors were locked at the time of the fire.

The ruins of the single-storey dormitory of Kyanguli Mixed Secondary School were still smoking midday Monday and still contained the charred remains of the dead boys huddled at one end of an aisle between tightly packed bunk beds.

Police said the fire started around 1:40 am and that the dead were aged between 15 and 18.

An AFP journalist at the scene saw 57 bodies tagged, put in plastic bags and taken away in a truck.

"We suspect arson. We highly suspect that it was criminal," Julius Narangwi, the officer commanding Machakos police division, told reporters at the scene, some 60 km southeast of Nairobi.

"Already, there are some people talking about the smell of petrol," said Commissioner of Police Philemon Abongo.

"Fifty-eight are so far dead, 28 have been taken to hospital," added

the country's top law enforcement officer.

"One of us saw a man wearing an adidas jacket pouring some liquid on the floor. He thought it was water," said Ikombe Mulwa Musili, 15, who survived after waking up to find his bed on fire.

"They tried on Saturday. The administration was aware," said one pupil who asked not to be named.

Several people at the school said school authorities had been alerted Saturday to the smell of petrol.

One of the police investigators said that the way the fire had reportedly spread so quickly suggested flammable liquid had been used.

Staff members suggested a link between the fire and the cancellation of some 36 students' final exam results because of cheating.

"All leads are open. This is one of the leads," said police spokesman Peter Kimanthi, adding that no arrests had yet been made and that the police were not seeking anyone in particular.

At least one of the two doors of the dormitory was locked when fire broke out, according to a police officer who asked not to be named.

And according to English teacher Francis Ngunga, a pupil came out of the dormitory in the middle of the night to tell the matron about the presence of liquid on the room's floor.



Police sappers inspect the remains of a car that exploded in Jerusalem's Talpiot retail and industrial area yesterday. The radical Palestinian group Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the car bomb blast which injured at least three people when it exploded near a supermarket during morning rush hour.

## Indian census shows decline in population growth

AFP, New Delhi

India's population grew by 181 million over the past decade -- roughly the size of Brazil -- but the latest census figures show an actual decline in the growth rate as well as improving literacy.

According to preliminary figures released by the Census Commissioner, India's population as of midnight on March 1 stood at 1,027,015,247 -- second only to China.

But the census for 1991-2001 also showed a decline in the decadal population growth rate from 23.86

per cent during 1981-1991 to 21.34 per cent.

Census Commissioner J.K. Banthia said it was the "sharpest decline since independence" in 1947.

Another welcome statistic showed an improvement in the gender ratio from 927 women per 1,000 men in 1991 to 933:1,000.

The government and non-government organisations have launched a series of awareness-raising campaigns aimed at eroding the bias for male children in India, where female infanticide, and

especially foeticide, remain widespread.

The literacy rate among the population of seven years and above showed a significant rise from 52.21 per cent in 1991 to 65.38.

However the figures continued to show a marked gender disparity, with three-quarters of men determined as literate compared to just over half of all women.

The northern state of Uttar Pradesh remained India's most populous province with 166 million people -- the same size as Pakistan.

## Pakistan's second N-plant opens tomorrow

AFP, Islamabad

A Pakistani nuclear power plant built with Chinese assistance will be opened by military ruler General Pervez Musharraf on Thursday, the Atomic Energy Commission said.

The Chashma Nuclear Power Plant in central Punjab province was a "model of cooperation" between Pakistan and China, the commission said in a statement yesterday.

Built with the collaboration of the Chinese National Nuclear Corporation, Pakistan's second nuclear plant will supply 1,840 million kilowatts per hour of electricity to the government's Water and Power Development Authority.

## Palestinians drop call for UN observers in compromise bid

AP, United Nations

After marathon negotiations, the Palestinians dropped their call for UN observers to help end six months of violence and agreed instead to let the Security Council decide on measures to protect Palestinian civilians. But it wasn't clear whether the United States would accept the compromise.

The United States, which is Israel's closest ally on the Security Council, had threatened to veto any resolution that referred to a UN force to protect Palestinians.

"We're close enough, that we could agree if the others were willing to do that and we're far enough apart that we could easily not agree, so I don't really know how we're going to end up," acting US ambassador James Cunningham said early Tuesday.

With the Palestinians pressing for a vote before Tuesday's summit of Arab leaders in the Jordanian capital, Amman, a small group of council members met into the early hours Tuesday trying to reach consensus on a resolution.

Palestinian supporters from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of developing countries initially said they had reached agreements with the four European members of the Security Council on a compromise resolution that would call for a new "mechanism" to protect Palestinian civilians.

"It is acceptable to everybody and we are waiting for the message from Washington," Bangladesh's

UN Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, current head of the Non-aligned Movement in the council, said Monday night.

Later, he said he was "still optimistic" that the council would adopt a resolution, but there were still two problem issues the time frame of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's report to the council on his consul-

tation with the Israelis and Palestinians on implementing the resolution, and stronger language on ending the violence.

"I'm very hopeful," said acting ambassador Valeri Kuchynski of Ukraine, whose country holds the rotating Security Council presidency. "There is a chance there may be a consensus."

## Commandos storm rebel-seized police station in Kashmir: 7 dead

AFP, Srinagar, India

Seven people were left dead yesterday after Indian commandos launched a midnight assault on a police compound in Kashmir to free hostages held by a Muslim militant suicide squad.

The final death toll since the militants forced their way into the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) 88 battalion headquarters in Srinagar on Monday afternoon stood at four policemen, two militants and one civilian.

The commando operation was launched around midnight as elite

counter-insurgency troops moved in on the four-storey building inside the compound where the three militants had barricaded themselves and a number of hostages.

Two of the militants were shot dead, while the third managed to escape amid the confusion.

Four CRPF personnel were killed and four seriously wounded in the initial attack on the camp when the three militants, wearing Indian security uniforms shot their way into the compound.

One civilian was also killed in the ensuing crossfire.

A spokesman for the Pakistan-

based Lashkar-e-Taiba militant group called a local news agency and said the militants were members of their outfit.

Lashkar militants have been behind numerous "suicide" attacks on security installations in Kashmir, in which two or three people storm a compound and open fire until they are eventually shot dead by the security forces.

Some 34,000 people have been killed in separatist-linked violence in the Muslim majority Kashmir since the launch of an insurgency against Indian rule in 1989.

## 73rd annual Academy Awards 'Gladiator' best film

AFP, Los Angeles

It was a night for the oldest and newest in Hollywood, the tried and true along with the breathtakingly fresh. Ancient Roman epic "Gladiator" had a foot in both camps -- a film that was in many ways a throwback to the grand old days of "Ben Hur" and "The Ten Commandments" -- updated with a fresh new vision and hottest new digital movie-making techniques.

"Gladiator" won five Oscars at Sunday's 73rd annual Academy Awards, including best picture and best actor for star Russell Crowe.

Meanwhile "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," the Mandarin-language martial-arts romance that took home four Oscars, including best foreign-language film, was something totally new to American filmmaking.

"Crouching Tiger" has been a word-of-mouth box office phenomenon here, exposing North American moviegoers to traditional Chinese historical romance, and action as only Hong Kong cinema can do it.

But in the end the epic from Taiwanese director Ang Lee lost out to Ridley Scott's swaggering, sword-swinging tale of ancient Rome for best picture.

In a surprise, Lee himself -- who had been favoured to win best director -- lost to Steven Soderbergh for hard-edged "Traffic," which won four Oscars.

The success of sprawling, documentary-style "Traffic" -- which, ironically, many here had predicted would flop at the box office -- showed that movies could deal with serious, complicated issues without turning off mass audiences.

Representing the feel-good Hollywood standard meanwhile was "Erin Brockovich," which won star and three-time nominee Julia Roberts her expected Oscar for best actress.

Roberts, 33, played a crusading law clerk in "Erin Brockovich," the true story of a tough-talking single mother who discovers that a powerful utility is poisoning the drinking water of a California community.



Composer Tan Dun holds his trophy for Best Original Score for his work on "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon".

### Oscar winners

AFP, Los Angeles

The following Oscars were presented at the 73rd annual Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Awards here Sunday:

- Best picture -- "Gladiator"
- Best director -- Steven Soderbergh, "Traffic"
- Best actor -- Russell Crowe, "Gladiator"
- Best actress -- Julia Roberts, "Erin Brockovich"
- Best supporting actor -- Benicio Del Toro, "Traffic"
- Best supporting actress -- Marcia Gay Harden, "Pollock"
- Best foreign film -- "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (Taiwan)
- Best original screenplay -- Cameron Crowe, "Almost Famous"
- Best adapted screenplay -- Stephen Gaghan, "Traffic"
- Best art direction -- "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"
- Best original score -- Tan Dun, "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"
- Best film editing -- "Traffic"
- Best sound -- "Gladiator"
- Best make-up -- "Dr. Seuss' How the Grinch Stole Christmas"
- Best costume design -- "Gladiator"
- Best short live action film -- "Quiero Ser"
- Best animated short film -- "Father and Daughter"
- Best original song -- Bob Dylan, "Things Have Changed," from "Wonder Boys"
- Best documentary feature -- "Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport"
- Best short documentary -- "Big Mama"
- Best outstanding visual effects -- "Gladiator"
- Best cinematography -- "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"
- Best sound effects editing -- "U-571"



Best Actor nominee Tom Hanks arrives with his wife Rita Wilson at the 73rd Annual Academy Awards in Los Angeles on Sunday.