

Sunni party leader, 5 others shot dead in pakistan

AFP, Karachi

Unidentified gunmen shot dead six people including a religious party leader in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi yesterday, police said.

The assailants intercepted Saleem Qadri, president of the Muslim fundamentalist Sunni Tehreek (Sunni Movement), soon after he drove out of his home in Baldia neighbourhood with other party men and family members to offer Friday prayers.

They sprayed bullets at the car, killing Qadri and his two nephews on the spot, city police chief Tariq Jameel said.

Two of his associates including a cousin died later in hospital, while Qadri's two sons were in serious conditions with bullet wounds, police said. A police officer assigned to guard Qadri was also killed.

"It is definitely an act of terrorism," Jameel said without blaming any group.

Police said Qadri's murder could be linked to his group's differences with other Sunni organisations.

Security has been tightened in the city to prevent unrest and revenge attacks, Jameel said.

Sectarian violence involving Sunni extremists and their counterparts in the minority Shiite community has claimed dozens of lives in Pakistan this year.

Car bomb blast kills six in Colombia

AFP, Bogota

A car bomb blast in northwestern Medellin killed at least six people and injured 82 others hours after the biggest mass kidnapping in Colombia's history ended with the release of 201 people by a right-wing paramilitary group.

At least 30 kilograms of dynamite were set off inside a vehicle at 10:05 pm on Thursday at Lleras square, said Medellin Mayor Luis Perez.

Lleras square, in the El Poblado sector of Medellin, situated 490 km northwest of here, is a popular night spot with many restaurants and night clubs.

"With (local) hospitals reporting, we have determined that there are six people dead and 82 injured," the head of the city's security service, Isaac Gaviria, told reporters in Medellin.

Nobody has come forward to claim responsibility for the blast. Witnesses reported seeing two women and two men getting out of the explosives-laden car after parking it on the square.

The blast, set off by remote control according to preliminary reports from police experts on the scene, damaged several night clubs and completely destroyed 12 nearby vehicles.

Another unclaimed car bomb exploded May 4 outside La Torre Hotel in the southwestern city of Cali, injuring 36 people. On January 10, a car bomb killed one person and injured 50 in a Medellin shopping centre, but police have as yet no clues about the perpetrators.

Saddam reelected head of Baath party

DPA, Baghdad

Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was unanimously re-elected as the secretary general of his ruling Baath party during its 12th regular congress on Thursday.

Iraq satellite channel kept broadcasting the deliberations of the annual meeting early Friday highlighted by Saddam's 40-minute speech during which he gave guidelines to newly elected members of about seven, including his younger son and head of the elite republican guard Qusbiy.

In his highly ideological speech, Saddam described the sanctions imposed on his country as "unjust."

The announcer referred to the gathering as "the Jerusalem Conference, to liberate Palestine from the river to the sea, God willing."

In his expressions, Saddam used expressions as "the Zionists; the criminals..." and ended it by saying "glory to the martyrs. Long live our glorious Arab nation, long live Iraq, long live Palestine, long live the army and Allah is great."

The party's ruling 12-member team, led by Saddam, were elected once more including the two vice presidents Ezzat Ibrahim and Tahah Yassin Ramadan in addition to deputy Prime Minister and acting Foreign Minister Tarek Aziz and others.

Saddam, who has been Iraq's president since 1979, reappointed Ibrahim as acting secretary general of the Baath party.

One woman, Hoda Saleh Amaash, was elected as the seventh new member.

N-sanctions on India, Pakistan must go: Bush nominee

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush's nominee for a crucial South Asia policy post on Thursday took aim at sanctions imposed to punish India and Pakistan's 1998 nuclear tests, saying they had outlived their usefulness and should be lifted.

Christina Rocca, Assistant Secretary of State designate for South Asian Affairs, said at a Senate confirmation hearing that the administration was reviewing all US sanctions, including those against India and Pakistan.

"My personal perception is that these sanctions have outlived their usefulness and that we need to find a new framework, and a new way to accomplish our nuclear concerns and get rid of the sanctions."

"The sanctions have to go," she told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Her statement was the latest sign that the resolve to keep the sanctions in place may have departed along with the administration of former president Bill Clinton.

And even during the last year of the Clinton era, which ended in January, there was a growing sense that sanctions imposed in the aftermath of the two sides' nuclear tests in May 1998 had outlived their usefulness.

Rocca's hearing coincided with talks here between India's Foreign Secretary Chokila Iyer, New Delhi's most senior career diplomat and US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Marc Grossman.

"The question of sanctions did come up, the Bush administration is taking a review of all the sanctions so we await further developments on that," Iyer said.

"We hope it will be done soon," Iyer added.

Rocca said the sanctions regime was hampering Washington's capacity to engage the two bitter South Asian rivals.

Left Front to face new challenges despite success in West Bengal polls

BSS, Kolkata

Despite the success in the West Bengal polls with a two-thirds majority, analysts say the Left Front would now face a real challenge in meeting its own promises.

"This comes not from Mamata Banerjee or Saifuddin Choudhury, but from meeting the promise of a renewed Left that chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee spoke of all through the campaign," a commentator said.

Industrial stagnation, rampant unemployment, poor infrastructure, less-than-expected gains in education, a dismal health sector are among the frequently cited reasons for the decline in the Left Front's popularity in the state the two-third majority of which is actually its worst performance in general.

Although no other state has been able to equal West Bengal's record in land reforms, specifically the bestowing of ownership rights to the sharecropper (bargadar), the Left Front has been unable to channelise the consequent rural prosperity into industrial resurgence. It is this lack, coupled with the support from those who were displaced by the land reforms, which had made Mamata's challenge so formidable.

The one reason why Jyoti Basu's successor Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee succeeded in turning an adverse tide in favour of the Left Front was his promise to innovate. His accessibility, lack of arrogance, admission of failure helped change the image of an 'unchanging Left.'

But what struck a chord with voters, particularly with urban voters who are among the most trenchant opponents of the CPI (M), was his attitude to change.

Instead of harping on the successes of Left Front rule land reforms, regular panchayat elections, agricultural prosperity, communal harmony he pointed to all its shortcomings, and promised to rectify them. The challenge before the Left Front is to go about doing just that. And campaign trail rhetoric is simply not enough.

But much of the credit for the Left's ability to retain its slipping hegemony should go to its rivals. If it were not for Mamata Banerjee's sustained, no holds barred, and utterly single minded goal of "throwing the CPI(M) into West Bengal," the CPI(M) would not have shaken itself out of its comfortable stagnancy, basking forever in the afterglow of the success of

Operation Barga.

And if it were not for dissident Saifuddin Choudhury's decision to finally quit and float the Party for Democratic Socialism (PDS), the CPI(M)'s cadres would not have been reinvigorated and motivated despite to come to the aid of the party.

For, communists thrive under attack and whenever there is a challenge within, disgruntled party members forget their chronic disenchantment with the leadership and put their best foot forward to keep

the Red Flag flying. But the basic problems that gave rise to the Mamata challenge and the emergence of the PDS have not gone away.

If Mamata Banerjee represented the challenge without, Saifuddin reflected the turmoil within. Saifuddin, like many others dissident leaders before him, could not make much of a dent to the edifice of the communist party. Be it Nripen Chakroborty in Tripura, or M V Raghavan and Gowriamma in Kerala, Communist leaders, no matter how senior, seldom succeed in damaging their erstwhile party.

But the basic problems that gave rise to the Mamata challenge and the emergence of the PDS have not gone away.



PHOTO:AFP

Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid (R) looks on as the new chief Justice of the Supreme Court Bagir Manan signs official documents during his swearing-in ceremony at the presidential palace in Jakarta yesterday. After months of delays and controversy, Wahid finally installed Manan, one of two candidates proposed by parliament.

Last Mughal emperor's grave evoking new passions in Myanmar

AP, Yangon

After he died in exile in British captivity, the last Mughal emperor of India was buried and forgotten as a footnote in history.

Nearly 140 years later, Bahadur Shah Zafar is stirring new passions.

Since the discovery of his grave in 1991 in a quiet, leafy part of Yangon, the foreign king has been worshipped as a "pir," or saint, by Myanmar's Muslims as well as people of other faiths.

The tomb has also become the focus of a diplomatic tussle between India and Pakistan, with both trying to assert themselves as the rightful inheritors of the emperor's legacy. Pakistan, carved out of India as a homeland for Muslims when British colonial rule ended in 1947, maintains Zafar was a Muslim emperor

rather than an India emperor.

"Who was this man called Zafar? He was a Mughal Muslim king who ruled India," Pakistan Embassy diplomat Sahebzada Khan said.

But to the caretakers of Zafar's mausoleum, he was simply a saint, a poet-scholar and a symbol of communal harmony.

"He was not only a king but also a saint. Even Buddhists, Hindus and Christians come here to seek his blessing," said Abdul Rahim, A member of the committee that manages the mausoleum.

He said 20 to 25 people visit his tomb every day and sit at its foot to meditate, believing that wishes made there are fulfilled.

Zafar's aura of holiness is due to his reputation as a scholar of Sufism, an ascetic movement within Islam. The folklore and the mystery

surrounding his long-lost grave has added to the mysticism.

During his time, Zafar was one of the foremost poets of the Urdu language and an accomplished calligrapher. His poems, or ghazals, are still popular in India and Pakistan, the two countries that together formed the Moghul empire that was established in 1526. It ended when Zafar was dethroned by the British in 1858.

He died four years later at age 87 after penning his own epitaph in the form of a "ghazal," a biting lament against the British for leaving him to die in a foreign land:

How unlucky Zafar is!
For his burial,
He couldn't get even two yards of earth

In my beloved country.
Born to a Muslim father and a

Hindu mother, Zafar succeeded to the throne in 1837 but only as a figurehead. India was really controlled by the British East India Company.

When Muslim and Hindu soldiers of the East India Company revolted in May 1857, Zafar became a rallying point for what some now call India's first independence war, the mutineers proclaimed Zafar the true emperor of India. But the rebellion was crushed and Zafar was exiled for life to Myanmar, or Burma as it was known.

In Yangon, Zafar was kept in a shed attached to the bungalow of a junior British officer. He died on Nov 7, 1862, and his grave was deliberately concealed to prevent it from becoming a focus of nationalist sentiments.



PHOTO:AFP

Women activists of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) hold empty earthen pots and shout anti-Delhi government slogans during a demonstration in New Delhi yesterday to protest against water shortage. The Indian capital, which has 14 million residents, has been facing acute shortages of water since the onset of summer this year.

Lankan peace efforts suffer setback 12 security personnel killed in fresh violence

AFP, Colombo

Norway's special envoy Erik Solheim failed to secure an agreement on a ceasefire during talks with Tamil Tiger rebels Friday, as fresh violence killed 12 security personnel, officials said.

Solheim had travelled to an area held by the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to ask them to enter into peace negotiations with the government but returned without a deal, the rebels said.

"No agreement was reached at this discussion," the LTTE said in a two-page statement.

"Both parties agreed to continue the deliberations at a later date. The Norwegian delegates left for Colombo early this morning."

The LTTE insisted they would not talk to the government unless a ban on the group is lifted.

The government ban was introduced in January 1998, immediately after an LTTE suicide bomber attacked the holiest Buddhist temple in the central town of Kandy, with devastating results.

The rebels said they also wanted Colombo to remove economic sanctions and agree to a permanent truce.

"These are not demands or preconditions for talks but rather pre-requisite necessary steps to create the very foundation for political negotiations," the LTTE statement said.

Meanwhile, officials said a total of 12 security personnel, including a constable, were killed in three attacks on Friday in the Vavuniya district, 260 km north of the capital.

Hours before Solheim crossed the front lines there, the rebels set off a powerful land mine killing one soldier.

Myanmar opposition group urges sanctions on junta

AP, Bangkok

A Myanmar opposition group called on governments yesterday to stop giving help to Myanmar's military junta, and praised the United States for focusing attention on human rights violations in that country.

The appeal by the National Council of the Union of Burma was in response to a recent announcement that Japan was considering giving a \$1.24 billion aid package to Myanmar to help repair a hydro-electric dam and power project.

The Washington-based council is a coalition of exiled political and

ethnic minority groups opposed to the military government of Myanmar, also known as Burma. It claims to be Myanmar's government-in-exile.

The Japanese "aid is not going to alleviate the suffering of the peoples of Burma, who have lost all their human rights under the repressive rule of the Burmese military authorities," the NCUB said in a statement received here.

"On the other hand, it would be like an incentive for the military regime to heap more repression on the peoples of Burma," it said.

The statement also welcomed

US Secretary of State Colin Powell's comments, criticising the Japanese aid package offer.

In his testimony at a Senate hearing on Tuesday, Powell said it was inappropriate for the Japanese government to deal with the military rulers of Myanmar, and that the aid package was "not a proper investment... at this time."

Describing Powell's comments as "most far-sighted and correct," the NCUB statement said "we would like to call upon all governments in the world to cease the giving of assistance" to the junta.

Wahid denies plans to disband parliament

AFP, Jakarta

Embattled Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid yesterday denied he was planning to disband parliament which is trying to oust him, but warned MPs not to underestimate his determination to hold on to power.

"I have never said a word about issuing a decree (to disband parliament). Don't believe in the twists made by the press," Wahid told Muslim worshippers after Friday prayers at the state palace.

He spoke as most daily newspapers, including the Jakarta Post, headlined a reported statement by navy chief of staff Admiral Indroko Sastrowiryo, saying he had advised Wahid not to issue a decree disbanding the house.

Such a move would "bring adversity to the people," Sastrowiryo said.

"We asked the president to consider it wisely before taking a

decision. If the president insists on issuing the decree, this country will have to pay dearly," he was quoted as saying by the Post.

Army chief of staff Endriartono Sutarto has also acknowledged Wahid's intention to disband parliament, and twice warned the president against such a move.

Reports have said Wahid put forward his intention to disband the DPR during a breakfast meeting on May 5 with the chiefs of the navy, army and air force.

Defiant Wahid earlier in the day warned against any suggestion that his fight to stay in office was weakening.

"I've been so tolerant that people think I'm weak. I am not. As a president I have to be humble," he said.

Wahid also said he would not tolerate any violation of the country's constitution, which he said gave the parliament no right to judge him.

"We'll risk anything for the constitution," he said.

Wahid has repeatedly accused parliament of violating their constitutional role by investigating two financial scandals the House linked to him, dubbed Bruneigate and Bulogateu.

MPs say the probe is part of their function to control the running of the government.

Bulogateu concerns the theft of 35 billion rupiah (3.5 million dollars) from the state food agency Bulog by his masseur claiming to be acting on his behalf.

Bruneigate centres around a two-million dollar donation from the Sultan of Brunei, for which the MPs said Wahid had failed to properly account.

In a thinly-veiled attack on the MPs trying to oust him, Wahid said only the judiciary had the right to judge him.

Taiwan President wants to meet Zemin at APEC

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian yesterday offered to meet his Chinese counterpart Jiang Zemin for a historic handshake and reconciliation talks at an October summit of APEC leaders in China.

His offer, which came a day after China said the Taiwanese leader would not be allowed to attend the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum summit in Shanghai, is certain to be rebuffed by Beijing.

But it is likely to play well internationally, particularly in the United States, where Chen is due to meet Congressmen next week during a stopover on his way to Latin America.

Chen said his administration was ready to hold dialogue or negotiations with the mainland at "any time, any place on any topics based on democracy, equality and peace."

"This year, the APEC conference

will be held in Shanghai, and under the privileges and obligations as a member of the group, I am expressing my will to personally attend it.

"I would also like to hold direct dialogue with Mr. Jiang Zemin to discuss, in addition to economic and trade issues, other topics of concern, including (the) 'three direct links'."

The latter was a reference to direct trade, postal and transport links between the mainland, which are currently banned.

Chen's proposal came in a nationally televised speech marking his first year in office. The leader of the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) took office on May 20 last year, ending half a century of rule by the Kuomintang (KMT), which had held power in Taiwan since 1949 when nationalist forces fled to the island after losing the Chinese civil war.

Asian, European FM's to discuss US missile defence

AFP, Beijing

Asian and European foreign ministers are set to discuss US plans to set up a national missile defence (NMD) when they meet next week in Beijing, a Chinese foreign ministry official said yesterday.

The gathering, which will bring together representatives of the 26 members of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), will discuss "disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation," said the official.

"In the course of the political dialogue, the ministers will discuss issues of concern to them, topical issues," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

He said a statement at the end of the foreign ministers' meeting, scheduled for Thursday and Friday next week, would reflect the main fields of interest, including politics.

ASEM is made up of 10 Asian countries and 15 European Union countries as well as the European Commission.

The US plans to establish the missile shield have been met with deep concern by many European nations, while the Chinese government expresses its opposition on a near-daily basis.

China is worried the missile shield will wipe out its tiny second-strike nuclear capability, and that a regional version of the system could reduce or annul its missile threat against Taiwan.

The row over the missile defence comes on top of a series of other issues straining the Sino-US relationship, ranging from the detention of US scholars in China to US surveillance flights near China's coastline and American arms sales to Taiwan.

The Chinese foreign ministry official denied the deterioration in Sino-US ties had directly translated into an improvement of its relations with European nations.

"About the relations between China and Europe, I believe they have always been very good," he said. "If you look at contacts between China and European partners, you'll see a steady growing trend. It's not a recent sharp trend."