

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 (Sunny 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 condition 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 Sunnis 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 Gavira, 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 Qusay.

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 Tahar 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.

"We in the United States have a lot to learn from cooperation with these two good friends, and it will be a mistake on all of our parts to allow ourselves to be trapped in the mistakes of the past," she said.

"The time has come individually and together to move forward."

The Indian government has made no secret of its desire to have all sanctions lifted, saying their presence hinders closer ties with the United States.

Some of the restrictions imposed on India were gradually eased during the last months of Clinton's second term.

The former president paid a triumphant visit to India last year and hosted an official trip by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to Washington.

Clinton had hoped to get India and Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, but failed.

The remaining sanctions apply to entities in India and Pakistan's nuclear industries. They also include US opposition to loans by international financial institutions and non-humanitarian projects.

Washington has traditionally counted Pakistan as a close ally, especially during the Cold War when India leaned towards the Soviet Union.

But in recent years, India and the United States have seemed to have more in common, given that both are large democracies and share a suspicion of China.

Pakistan and the United States, meanwhile, have sharp disagreements on Afghanistan's Islamic Taliban rulers.

Washington has also condemned the continued rule of Pakistan's military under General Pervez Musharraf.

Pakistan faces an extra range of sanctions imposed to punish the general's military takeover.



PHOTO: AFP

Women activists of the ruling Bharatiya 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.

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, com-

munal 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 their 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 enough 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 disengagement 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 Chakraborty in Tripura, or M V Raghavan and Gowriamma in Kerala, Communist leaders, no matter how senior, seldom succeed in damaging their erstwhile party.

But that does not detract from Saifuddin's revolt, and the support he gained from key district leaders on the eve of the election, reflects the inner-party problems faced by the CPI(M). Although the dissidents blame the lack of glasnost for their departure, the real problems go deeper.

There has been a continuous decline in the quality of cadres, not least because the CPI(M) leadership has made little effort to come to terms with the sweeping changes in the post-Soviet world.

Ideological confusion can do great damage to both the morale and the fighting ability of a cadre-based party. In the absence of a clear-cut line, opportunism gains ground; and the failure to innovate leads to a stagnant mindset masquerading as ideological purity.

West Bengal has reached a level of development from which it ought to make a spectacular take-off. Its failure to do that so far partly lies with the communist mindset that remains ever suspicious of all non-State efforts at development.

"It is time that West Bengal looked around, instead of looking back, and emulated the innovative efforts made by other States to extend education, health, and other facilities to its people," an analyst said.

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