



Peter Carey wins Booker Prize

AP, London

Australian writer Peter Carey won the Booker Prize on Wednesday for his novel "True History of the Kelly Gang."

Carey, who also won the prestigious award in 1988 for "Oscar and Lucinda," received this year's Booker at London's Guildhall.

His winning work is a fictional account of Australia's famous anti-hero Ned Kelly, portraying him as orphan, horse thief, bank robber, police killer and finally the nation's answer to Robin Hood.

The chairman of the judging panel, Lord Baker, called the book "a magnificent story of the early settler days in Australia, expressed through the unforgettable voice of a vilified man who came to stand for more than he knew."

The prize, and \$30,660 is bestowed annually on the best novel written in English by an author from Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth of former British colonies. It is arguably the most prestigious - and definitely the most glamorous - literary award in the English-speaking world.

Carey, who lives in New York, is only the second writer in the Booker's 33-year history to win the prize twice. South Africa's J.M. Coetzee won the Booker in 1983 and 1999.

Carey, 58, said his second win had left him shocked and delighted.

"I really thought I was beyond it, if I won it I would be fine, and if I didn't win it I would be fine," he said. "But I'm astonished to find I'm bursting with adrenaline and feeling like it never happened and here I am feeling like I've been run over by a truck."

Elections in Singapore Nov 3

AFP, Singapore

Singapore will go to the polls on November 3 after President S.R. Nathan dissolved parliament yesterday, the government said.

"The returning officer (of the elections department) has declared that Saturday, third November 2001 is polling day. Polling day is a public holiday," a government statement said.

Minutes earlier, a separate statement said: "The president on advice of the prime minister has dissolved parliament on Thursday, 18th of October 2001."

The dissolution of parliament came a day after the national electoral committee redrew the electoral boundaries, a move opposition leaders said would be to their disadvantage. There were only two opposition MPs in the 93-seat parliament just dissolved.

It also came hours after the PAP unveiled the first four of about 20 new candidates they expect to field along with the veterans in the elections.

Govt, Philippine rebels sign peace pact

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

The Philippine government said yesterday it had signed a peace pact with separatist Muslim rebels following talks in Kuala Lumpur, despite violations of an earlier cease-fire.

Representatives of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippine government have been holding talks in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur since Monday to reinforce a truce they signed there in August.

"We have signed the agreement this morning and we will move forward from this by setting up a monitoring body to implement the cessation of hostilities," the government's chief negotiator, Jesus Dureza, told reporters.

The rebels had fought for nearly 30 years for a separate Islamic state on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao before settling for lesser gains in talks brokered first by Libya and later Malaysia. The Philippines is predominantly Catholic but has many Muslims in its southern islands.

The Philippine military is fighting a second group of Muslim rebels on the southern island of Basilan. It accuses those rebels, the Abu Sayyaf, of being little more than a band of brigands who kidnap foreigners and Filipinos for ransom.

Israel demands arrest of minister's killers

2 Palestinians killed in Israeli incursions

AP, Jerusalem

Israel issued an ultimatum to Yasser Arafat yesterday, saying he must hand over the assassins of an Israeli Cabinet minister or face harsh retribution. In a first step, Israeli tanks entered two West Bank towns, and doctors said a Palestinian gunman and a 12-year-old school girl were killed by Israeli fire.

Israel did not give Arafat a deadline, but hinted that if its demands were not met, it would target the Palestinian Authority directly, something it has not done in a year of Mideast fighting.

Palestinian security forces detained three members of a radical PLO faction that claimed responsibility for Wednesday's killing of Israeli tourism Minister Rehavam Zeevi at a Jerusalem hotel. However, the Palestinian Authority has never before extradited suspected militants to Israel, and was not expected to do so now.

"Israel has to understand that we don't take orders," said Ahmed Abdel Rahman, the secretary general of the Palestinian Cabinet.

The showdown threatens to undercut Washington's efforts to win broad Arab and Muslim support for its military strikes against Afghanistan, whose Taliban regime is harbouring accused terrorist Osama bin Laden, the prime suspect in the Sept. 11 terror attacks on New York and Washington.

After a special session that lasted until early yesterday Israel's security Cabinet said Arafat must arrest and extradite the killers of Zeevi and those who sent them. The Palestinian leader must also outlaw several militant

Palestinian groups that have carried out attacks against Israelis, the Cabinet said.

If Arafat does not meet the demands, Israel "will have no choice but to declare the Palestinian Authority an entity that supports terrorism and act accordingly," the Cabinet statement said.

The Statement appeared to be intentionally vague to permit Israel some room to maneuver. In the past year of fighting, Israel has repeatedly shelled Palestinian police stations, entered Palestinian territory and killed suspected militants in targeted attacks. However, Palestinian leaders have been immune from Israeli retribution.

Early Thursday, Israeli tanks took up positions in outlying districts of the Palestinian towns of Jenin and Ramallah, drawing Palestinian fire. Troops imposed curfews in the areas they seized, Palestinian witnesses said.

In Jenin, shots fired from advancing Israeli tanks hit a classroom of an elementary school, killing a 12-year-old Palestinian girl and seriously wounding a classmate, Palestinian doctors said. The Israeli army confirmed there was an exchange of fire near the school and aid it was checking further. In Ramallah, a 25-year-old Palestinian gunman was shot in the head, Palestinian officials said.

Troops also imposed a curfew on the Jerusalem suburb of Izzariyah in the West Bank. Soldiers accompanied by dogs searched dozens of homes, including that of Palestinian Cabinet minister Ziad Abu Zayyad, a leading moderate, witnesses said.



Israeli tanks enter the West Bank town of Ramallah yesterday. Two Palestinians, including a 12-year-old girl, were killed by Israeli forces in Ramallah when Israeli tanks and bulldozers ploughed into the edges of the town.

Anthrax scare closes US Capitol

REUTERS, Washington

The anthrax scare sweeping the United States since the plane attacks on New York and Washington last month closed down much of the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday in an extraordinary precautionary move days after the nation's top-ranking senator received the potentially deadly biological warfare agent in the mail.

It was the second time in just over a month that the Capitol has been closed since the Sept. 11 hijacked plane attacks on New York and Washington that killed more than 5,400 people.

U.S. officials have said they

suspect but have no firm evidence the anthrax scare could be linked to Saudi-born Osama bin Laden, accused of masterminding the September attacks.

Thirty-one U.S. congressional staffers tested positive for anthrax exposure as Republican and Democratic leaders on Wednesday closed much of the U.S. Capitol complex.

In announcing the abrupt jump in the number of those affected in the broadening nationwide anthrax scare, the nation's top-ranking senator, Majority Leader Tom Daschle, said none of the Capitol Hill staffers, 23 of them his own employees, showed any sign of infection.

"The good news is that everyone will be OK," the South Dakota Democrat said, noting all had been on antibiotics since shortly after the potentially deadly anthrax bacteria was found in a letter opened in his office on Monday.

The anthrax letter opened in Daschle's office was similar to one sent to NBC anchor Tom Brokaw in New York. Both were postmarked Trenton, New Jersey. A third letter was sent to a tabloid newspaper in Florida, where anthrax spores killed a photo editor and sickened a mail room worker.

Preliminary genetic tests showed the strains of anthrax that infected people in New York and Florida are the same, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said on Wednesday.

Leaders of the Republican-controlled U.S. House of Representatives decided to close at the end of business on Wednesday for anthrax testing on their side of the Capitol Hill building. It marked an unprecedented halt to business for an environmental safety check. The last time there was such a closure was on the day of the September attacks.

The nearby Library of Congress also announced it would close on Thursday for an examination of its ventilation system and, like the House, would probably reopen on Tuesday.

Daschle said the Senate would remain at work though three Senate office buildings would be closed for expanded environmental examinations.

"There is no risk here at the Capitol," said Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott, a Mississippi Republican who joined Daschle at a news conference in a show of bipartisan unity.

Kenyan family becomes first victims outside America

AFP, Nairobi

Four members of a Kenyan family have become the first confirmed victims of an anthrax attack outside the United States after they were exposed to the deadly bacteria through a letter posted in the US, Health Minister Sam Ongeri said Thursday.

The letter was posted in Atlanta on September 8 - three days before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon - and received in Kenya about a month later, Ongeri told a news conference.

The letter also bears a marking from Miami. No details of the family affected have been released.

Ongeri said that two other letters, including one received this week at a United Nations complex here, were still being examined.

"In all the cases, mails containing powder-like material was found and so far one has tested positive for anthrax by stain and smear," Ongeri said.

The results of the analysis of a letter suspected of containing anthrax bacteria received at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) were expected later Thursday, Ongeri said.

The letter sent to an unnamed employee at UNEP bore Pakistani postage stamps, the agency's spokesman Tore Brevik said.

Ongeri said the Kenya government had set up a "national multi-sectoral taskforce" to tackle the anthrax alert.

India accuses Pakistan of heavy firing in Kashmir

AP, Jammu

India accused the Pakistan army of unprovoked heavy firing from across the international border in Jammu-Kashmir yesterday, a day after the US secretary of state ended his visit to the sub-continent aimed at easing tensions between the archrivals.

India returned the fire, but the severity of the Pakistani action was much higher than normal in the Akhnoor sector, 35 kilometres northwest of Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, soldiers began early yesterday and continued for nearly 10 hours

in the Akhnoor sector in an eight-kilometre belt of the international border, a top Border Security Force officer said on condition of anonymity.

There was no immediate comment from Pakistan.

India returned the fire, but the severity of the Pakistani action was much higher than normal in the Akhnoor sector, 35 kilometres northwest of Jammu, the winter capital of Jammu-Kashmir state,

the officer said. No casualties were reported on the Indian side.

On Wednesday, Pakistan accused New Delhi of a troop buildup along the Line of Control, or cease-fire line, that separates Indian and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and said its forces were in a state of high alert.

In New Delhi, Indian Army spokesman Col. Shruti Kant said the movements were a routine troop rotation.

S Arabia issues stern warning to bin Laden supporters

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia delivered a stern warning yesterday to supporters and sympathisers of prime terror suspect Osama bin Laden, saying they are not acceptable in the kingdom and would be "amputated."

"Don't forget that those in their caves and hideouts are the ones who have abused your country," Interior Minister Prince Nayef bin Abdul Aziz said, referring to bin Laden, who was born into one of the kingdom's wealthiest families.

"Unfortunately they are counted as Muslims, but Islam disassociates itself from them," the minister was quoted as saying by the official SPA news agency.

He said these people were "ill and cannot be accepted in Saudi society, even if they were part of us."

"Some organs of the body may become ill, but the sick organ is amputated," he warned from the eastern city of Damam, SPA said.

The message follows a series of fatwas - religious edicts - published by a number of Muslim scholars inside and outside of Saudi Arabia critical of the US-led war on Afghanistan and the silence of some Islamic states.

Nayef urged the country's security chiefs to be alert, particularly against "those who attempt to abuse security in the name of Islam, while in fact they are either ignorant of Islam or misled."

"We tell those who are outside and inside the kingdom, we will - God willing - remain secure (by) depending on the Almighty."

"We do not accept that anyone outbids us on Islam, while we are the home of Islam and are implementing Islamic sharia law. How dare such men declare the people of this country, its leaders, ulama (scholars) and women as infidels," the prince said.

Saudi Arabia, home to Islam's holiest sites in Mecca and Medina, has condemned the September 11 terror attacks in the United States and declared support for an anti-terror campaign, but has not publicly supported the strikes on Afghanistan.

Prince Nayef vowed to maintain security in the vast desert kingdom.

"We are responsible for the security of all Saudi citizens and expatriates... Do not show sympathy to those who attempt to abuse the security of this nation... regardless of who they are," he said, addressing security officials.

APEC nations agree to fight terrorism

AFP, Shanghai

Pacific Rim nations yesterday agreed to intensify common efforts to fight terrorism during talks attended by US Secretary of State Colin Powell, officials said.

Foreign ministers of the 21-member Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum finalised an historic anti-terrorism declaration to be issued at a weekend APEC summit due to be attended by US President George W. Bush.

Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan told reporters the ministers had agreed that APEC leaders would call for countries to choke off terrorist funds and bolster the role of the United Nations in the anti-terror fight.

"The fight against terrorism is a fight between good and evil, and a trial of strength between civilisation and barbarity, rather than a conflict among different ethnic groups, religions or cultures," he quoted ministers as agreeing.

The United States has stressed that its campaign against Taliban-ruled Afghanistan launched after the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington is not a war on Islam.

According to a draft of the unprecedented declara-

tion, the APEC leaders will denounce the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, pledge to choke off terrorist funds and cooperate to ensure oil security.

"Leaders unequivocally condemn in the strongest terms the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 as a profound threat to the peace, prosperity and security of all people, of all faiths, of every nation," the proposed declaration obtained by AFP says.

The statement will be the first separate declaration on a political matter issued by APEC, which normally confines its discussions to trade and economic topics.

But the ministers had agreed that all manner of terrorist activity posed a threat to international security and should be condemned, Tang said.

All anti-terrorist international covenants and resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council should be implemented and any acts of financing terrorism should be prevented, he said.

APEC groups Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, the US and Vietnam.



NASA chief to resign next month

AP, Cape Canaveral

Daniel Goldin, who pushed NASA to be leaner and faster and then came under fire for it, said Wednesday he will resign from the space agency next month after nearly 10 years in the top job.

The longest-serving administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration will leave in mid-November with a record of 160 successful space missions, 11 failures - including back-to-back Mars flops - and an international space station that is now permanently occupied.

His tenure was sometimes tumultuous, with some in his own agency attacking his "faster, better, cheaper" philosophy of building and flying spacecraft. Critics said his approach endangered the space shuttle and other programmes. And Goldin acknowledged the space agency experienced a brain drain in recent years.

But to his critics, Goldin had only this to say Wednesday: "So be it."

"You want to know something? If you come to a job like this and love to be loved, you will never do the right thing," he said. "I not only have no apologies, but I am thrilled with the performance" of NASA.

Last year, however, Goldin acknowledged to a Senate panel. "We probably cut too tight." He had reduced the space agency work force from 25,000 to 18,500 in seven years.

Japan's lower house approves bill for US support

REUTERS, Tokyo

Parliament's Lower House approved yesterday a bill allowing Japan's military to provide non-combat support for U.S.-led retaliation against the September 11 attacks, clearing the way for enactment of the controversial legislation later this month.

The bill, which clarifies the role Japan's military could play in U.S.-led operations without violating the nation's pacifist constitution, was adopted despite objections by the main opposition Democratic Party and other opposition groups.

But Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi had wanted to see the powerful lower chamber approve the legislation before he heads to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit this weekend in Shanghai, where he is set to meet President Bush and other leaders.

"I am relieved," Taku Yamasaki, secretary-general of the dominant Liberal Democratic Party, told reporters. "I think we were able to pass the bill in a timely fashion because...there is high public support for the Koizumi cabinet."

Under the current law, Japan cannot engage in any type of military action unless it is threatened or attacked directly.

Though Koizumi's three-way ruling coalition had enough votes to enact the law on its own, it had been seeking opposition support to avoid making it a partisan issue.

But in a crucial meeting held late on Monday, Koizumi failed to persuade Democratic Party leader Yukio Hatoyama to drop his demand that the bill be revised to require parliamentary approval prior to any dispatch of Japanese troops overseas.

The government did revise draft

legislation to require that parliamentary approval be obtained within 20 days after the dispatch of troops and to ban transportation on land of arms and ammunition.

Koizumi, keen to show that Japan is a reliable U.S. ally, promised speedy passage of the bill when he met Bush in Washington last month.

Under the legislation, effective for two years and extendable for up to two more years, Japan could dispatch military forces to provide rearward logistical support, such as medical services and provision of supplies, as well as humanitarian aid for refugees.

The Lower House also approved a bill designed to allow Japanese troops to protect U.S. military facilities in Japan and a bill to revise the current law governing the Japanese Coast Guard, allowing them to fire at suspicious ships to stop them.