

Uproar in Indian parliament over attack on Orissa House

AFP, New Delhi

India's lower house of parliament was adjourned Monday in uproar over a Hindu mob attack on a state legislature building in the eastern state of Orissa.

The mob of Hindu hardliners vandalised the Orissa state legislature on Saturday to protest alleged remarks made by lawmakers opposing a temple-building drive in a disputed holy site in the northern town of Ayodhya.

At least 500 activists of the right-wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council - VHP), which has spearheaded the temple-building programme, and the militant Bajrang Dal have been blamed for the attack.

Militants attack security camp in Srinagar

AFP, Srinagar

Separatist militants attacked a security camp Monday in the heart of Indian-administered Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, injuring a soldier, a police spokesman said.

He said militants fired four rifle grenades at a paramilitary camp in Srinagar's Sanat Nagar area, close to the headquarters of the Border Security Force (BSF), the main force battling Kashmir insurgents.

"All the grenades exploded closer to the camp, injuring a soldier on patrol duty," the police spokesman said.

One of the grenades fired Monday exploded near a telephone exchange. The blasts caused panic in the area, and troops opened fire in the air.

The Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack, saying its target was the BSF headquarters.

Ne Win under tight security as coup probe goes on

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's former dictator Ne Win and his daughter Sandar Win continued to be held in their Yangon home under tight security and could face questioning soon, a junta spokesman said on Monday.

In the meantime, some one hundred people, both civilian and military, had been called in for questioning as part of the ongoing investigation into the alleged attempted coup against the military junta, the spokesman said.

The ailing 92-year-old Ne Win and Sandar Win "continue to be kept under tight security while the investigation into the attempted coup goes on. Both are in good health," said deputy chief of military intelligence Major General Kyaw Win, reading a statement to reporters in the wake of the arrest of Ne Win's son-in-law and three grandsons on March 7.

North Korean defectors arrive in Seoul

AFP, Seoul

Twenty-five North Koreans who sought sanctuary in a western embassy in China last week arrived Monday in South Korea where they want to settle, witnesses said.

The 25 -- members of six families and two orphaned girls -- were the single biggest group of defectors to arrive in South Korea since the 1950-53 Korean War.

They arrived on Korean Air flight from Manila at 5:20pm (0820 GMT) as part of a deal negotiated after the group entered the Spanish embassy in Beijing last Thursday.

Commandos were placed on alert at Incheon International Airport for their arrival and the group were told to remain seated in their business class seats on the jet until other passengers had disembarked.

'Iraq may allow UN weapons inspectors under set terms'

AFP, Dubai

Iraq may allow UN arms inspectors back into the country if the United Nations draws up a list of sites and a timetable for inspections, Vice-President Taha Yassin Ramadan said in comments published Monday.

"Iraq refuses the return of inspectors for as long as the sites for inspection and a precise timetable are not drawn up," he told Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper.

Baghdad's refusal to submit to arms inspections since weapons monitors fled the country ahead of



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar (L) bows his head to respect the church attack victims during a seminar of Institute for Aasic Adult Development and Training (IBADT) in eastern city Lahore on Sunday along with other participants Anne Van der Bijl (C) of Holland and Naseem Hassain Shah, Pakistan's former Chief Justice. Five people were killed and 45 others injured in a grenade attack on a crowded church in Islamabad on Sunday morning.

White farmer shot dead in Zimbabwe

AFP, Harare

A white farmer was shot and killed overnight on his farm west of Harare, a spokeswoman for the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) said Monday.

"His body was found early Monday morning," Jenni Williams told AFP, adding that Terry Ford, who was in his mid-50s, was shot in the head at his farm near Norton, about 40 kilometers (30 miles) west of Harare.

Ford was visited late Sunday by about 20 supporters of the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Williams said.

"Mr. Ford fired a shot to scare away looters at approximately 11:30

pm (2130 GMT)," the CFU said in a statement.

He then alerted his neighbors as well as the police, to report that "looting was ongoing in his house by a group of about 20 persons in ZANU-PF T-shirts," the statement said.

Ford was alone in his house at the time. He called police a second time around 2:15 am (0015 GMT), as police had yet to respond, the statement said.

"There is evidence that he had tried to get away in his vehicle as the security fence shows evidence of damage caused by a vehicle," the statement said.

"The body was found next to a tree early this morning when an employee reported for duty," it said.

A farm near Ford's was looted last week, and the elderly owners were forced to leave, the statement said. On another nearby farm, an 81-year-old man who was away receiving cancer treatments had his home looted of all his household goods, it added.

Of the 70 people CFU believes were involved in the looting, three have been arrested, the statement said.

Ford's death came the day after President Robert Mugabe was inaugurated, following his controversial re-election in the March 9-11 poll, which his main opponent Morgan Tsvangirai said was "massively rigged" and marred by political violence.

Muslims' safety lies in goodwill of Hindus: RSS

Rioters defy curfew in Gujarat

AP, Bangalore

The ideological front group for India's main governing party on Sunday took a hardline stance toward the country's minority Muslims in the wake of Hindu-Muslim violence.

"Let Muslims understand that their safety lies in the goodwill of the majority Hindus," the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS, said in a resolution adopted at a meeting of its top leadership.

The RSS, which ended the three-day meeting in Bangalore Sunday, is the parent group of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party, the main party in India's ruling coalition.

"It does no credit to the Muslim community to allow themselves to be made pawns in the hands of extremist Muslim leaders and Hindu-baiting political elements," the RSS resolution said.

It didn't identify the extremist leaders or political elements.

The RSS also described as "spontaneous" recent Hindu attacks on Muslims in the western state of Gujarat.

More than 700 people, most of them Muslims, were killed in the violence that exploded after Muslims set fire to a train in Gujarat of February 27. Sixty Hindu nationalists died in the blaze.

Muslims make up about 14 per cent of India's more

than 1 billion people, most of whom are Hindus.

The RSS also adopted a strongly worded resolution against neighbouring Bangladesh, accusing Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government of pursuing anti-Hindu policies in the mainly Muslim country.

It said attacks on Bangladesh's minority Hindus have risen sharply after Zia came to power in October. Hindus account for 10 per cent of Bangladesh's 130 million people.

The RSS urged Vajpayee's government to take tough action if Bangladesh failed to help thousands of Hindus who have fled the country following recent attacks by supporters of the governing Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

Meanwhile, Hindu and Muslim mobs rampaged overnight in the western city of Ahmedabad, the scene last month of India's deadliest communal riots in a decade, police said Monday.

Despite a curfew on several parts of Ahmedabad, Hindu and Muslims mobs clashed in the Bapunagar area of the city on Sunday at 11:00 pm (1730 GMT), said the police.

Police opened fire and burst at least 33 tear-gas shells to disperse a 4,000-strong crowd.

At least 45 preventive arrests were made in Ahmedabad while 16 people were brought in for interrogation regarding their role in the violence.

Rocca rushes to Pakistan as diplomats fear more strikes

AFP, Islamabad

A top US envoy cut short a trip to India and rushed to Pakistan Monday following a grenade attack on a church in the capital which killed five people, including two Americans, as diplomats braced for further attacks on foreigners.

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Christina Rocca said she would escort the bodies of the two Americans back home, after she cancelled talks in New Delhi and flew to Islamabad.

US diplomat Milton Green was in a serious condition in hospital after the attack Sunday on the Protestant International Church in the diplomatic enclave which killed his wife Barbara and their 17-year-old daughter Kristin.

A Pakistani woman, an Afghan man and an unidentified man also died when an attacker hurled up to eight grenades into the church during prayer service.

Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider told CNN the attacker could be the badly-mutilated unidentified victim, adding that he may have been a "suicide bomber".

The Sri Lankan ambassador and his family, the Philippine-born wife of a Japanese diplomat and worshippers of another 11 nationalities, including eight Pakistanis, were among 46 people wounded.

The attack on the church used by expatriates and diplomats was widely seen as a direct strike on foreigners by militants furious at Islamabad's alliance with the US "war on terrorism".

Security was visibly beefed up in Islamabad's diplomatic quarter, with extra paramilitary police and soldiers deployed outside embassy compounds, residences and the church, where the blood-spattered ceiling and

floor lay testament to the carnage of the day before.

Police manned roadblocks and stopped all traffic to conduct identity checks, while international hotels put on extra guards.

The attack was the first on foreigners in Islamabad, a usually orderly and sleepy city immune from the violence that strikes other cities in Pakistan.

Diplomats said their worst fears of an escalation in violence against foreigners, which rose with the kidnapping in Karachi and murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl, had been realised.

"A few weeks ago we all agreed: the worst is yet to come. Now, it's here," one Western diplomat told AFP.

"They have ridiculed the government by striking in the most protected place in the country ... They have struck Christians ... families, and in particular, Americans."

The diplomatic corps was locked in talks on further increasing security at gatherings of expatriates.

"We have to expect that they will strike where it hurts most -- schools, church services, family gatherings where there are children," said another diplomat.

Pakistan announced a "high-level" investigation into the attack, and US officials, including President George W. Bush and Federal Bureau of Investigation chief Robert Mueller, said US agents would assist.

Foreign ministry spokesman Aziz Ahmed Khan said the government had "taken all possible measures for ... maximum deployment of security as far as the diplomatic enclave is concerned".

"It is unfortunate that this incident has taken place, it is condemnable, but the government will continue to provide maximum security to foreigners residing in Pakistan."

India delivers its first light helicopter

AFP, Bangalore

India has delivered its first advanced light helicopter to the country's Coast Guard ten years after the prototype made its maiden flight, officials said Monday.

The helicopters, designed and manufactured by state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) at a cost of 5.4 billion rupees (114 million dollars).

"As usual I feared we (were) going to fail a couple of years ago," HAL chairman N.R. Mohanty said of the delay in producing the helicopters, which cost 250 million rupees (5.1 million dollars) each.

Israeli, Palestinian officials hold security talks

Cheney faces boycott for ignoring Arafat

AFP, Jerusalem

High-level security talks between Israel and the Palestinians began Monday under the aegis of US envoy Anthony Zinni, the first such encounter between the two sides since an unprecedented wave of violence broke out nearly three weeks ago.

The meeting kicked off in Jerusalem late morning and came "after coordination and an agreement between Zinni and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat," West Bank preventive security chief Colonel Jibril Rajoub told AFP.

"In the light of the positive results of Sunday's security meeting, it was decided a meeting of the security high commission should be convened," a spokesman for Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer said.

According to the minister, both parties were discussing means of reaching a ceasefire and the details of an Israeli army withdrawal from autonomous Palestinian areas, known as Area A, it has reoccupied.

Taking part in the new meeting were Rajoub, his Gaza Strip counterpart Mohammad Dahlan, Israeli internal security chief Avi Dichter and Israeli army officials.

Meanwhile, Palestinian officials will boycott any meeting with Dick Cheney in order to protest at the US Vice President ruling out talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat during his visit to the region, information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said Monday.

"We are really surprised that a US vice president coming to the region to discuss serious issues, mainly the peace process, intends to meet with one and not the other," he told reporters outside Arafat's offices in Ramallah, referring to talks scheduled with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Chandrika seeks security boost for local polls

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga Monday called for the deployment of armed forces for upcoming local elections and accused the rival-run government of manipulating the police.

Kumaratunga asked Interior Minister John Amararatunga to call out security forces to protect polling booths at Wednesday's local council elections.

"I, as the president, have no faith in the police with regard to their capability to maintain law and order and act independently and impartially with cases of election-related violence," Kumaratunga said.

In a three-page letter to the interior minister, she "strongly recommended" that troops be called out from Tuesday and said she wanted a final decision from the government before the end of the Monday.

Kumaratunga's People's Alliance party lost the December

parliamentary elections but she can remain as president until December 2005 as she was elected directly at a separate election in 1999.

Since her party's humiliating defeat last year, she has been in an uneasy cohabitation with the government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and has publicly criticised his attempts to enter into a truce with Tamil Tiger rebels.

Kumaratunga has earlier underlined that she remains the commander-in-chief of the armed forces despite her party losing power in parliament. It was not clear in her letter why she could not exercise her constitutional powers and order the troops to the streets.

Sri Lanka's municipal, urban and village councils go to the polls on Wednesday. Councils in the embattled northeast are due to go to the polls five days later.

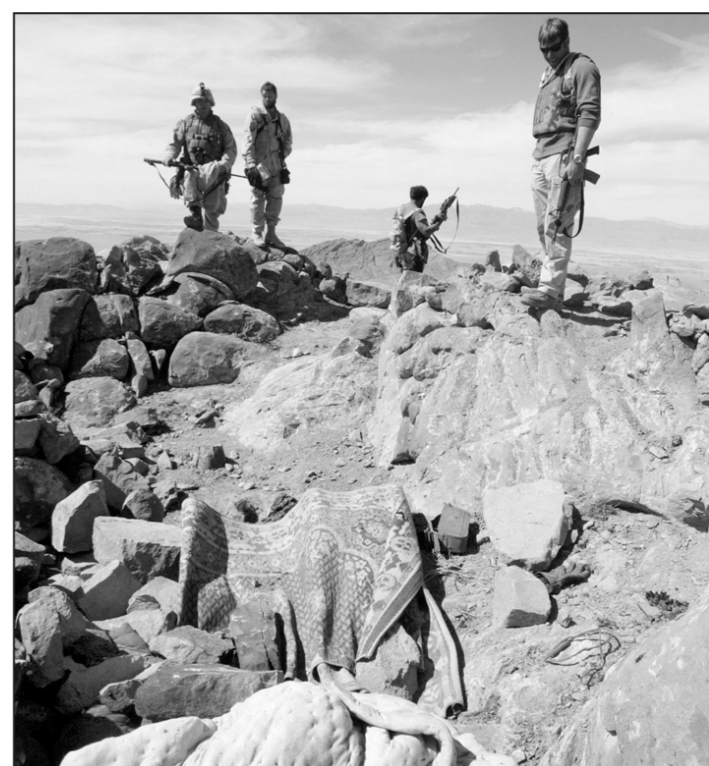


PHOTO: AFP
American soldiers look into a bombed out crater on the mountain top known as the "Whale" in the Shahikot valley region of eastern Afghanistan on Saturday where an al-Qaida or Taliban fighter's body lay buried beneath blankets and carpet after it was hit by US fire. The man was killed during Operation Anaconda as coalition troops pursue al-Qaida and Taliban in Afghanistan.

Howard calls on C'wealth to face moment of truth

AFP, Canberra

Australian Prime Minister John Howard said Monday the Commonwealth faced a moment of truth on whether to suspend Zimbabwe in the wake of presidential elections.

Howard is to meet the leaders of Nigeria and South Africa -- Olusegun Obasanjo and Thabo Mbeki -- in London on Tuesday to consider suspending Zimbabwe after President Robert Mugabe was sworn in for another six-year term.

Australian backpacker murderer jailed for 20 years

AFP, Brisbane

Homeless fruit picker Robert Long was sentenced to a minimum of 20 years behind bars Monday after being found guilty of killing 15 young backpackers in a shocking arson attack.

Long was last week found guilty of murder and arson, bringing to a close one of Australia's worst modern mass murders. The jury's verdict last Friday was unanimous.

India to test Agni III missile within 3 months

AFP, Bangalore

India will hold a new test of its nuclear-capable Agni III missile within three months and is planning to sell its aerial drones abroad, a government adviser said Monday.

V.K. Aatre, a scientific adviser to Defence Minister George Fernandes, said the missile which is being developed would have a range of 700 kilometres (440 miles).

India in January tested a short-range version of its Agni I missile, which had a similar range.

Pakistan condemned the test as

a "direct threat" to its national security.

Aatre said India's pilotless target aircraft, Lakshya (Target), would be soon sold to a foreign country, which he refused to name.

"The aerial drone is being taken to a foreign country for demonstration," he told reporters on the sidelines of a UN workshop on satellite-aided search and rescue.

Lakshya, a reusable aerial target system, is remotely piloted from the ground to provide training to gun and missile crews and to air defence pilots.

"It will soon be delivered to the army," Aatre said.

He also said India's unmanned aerial vehicle, Nishant, would be inducted into the military later this year and the country's most ambitious Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) second Technology Demonstrator would be flown soon.

"I am doing everything to fly three aircraft (LCA) by this year-end", he said. "The locally built Kaveri engine for the LCA will be sent to Russia during the middle of this year for high-altitude tests," Aatre said.



PHOTO: AFP
United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan meets with Iraqi vice President Ezzat Ibrahim at the presidential palace in Abu Dhabi on Sunday on a three-day official visit.