

12 killed in violence in Ambon city

AFP, Jakarta

At least 12 people were reported killed Sunday after a gang raided two Christian villages south of Indonesia's strife-torn Ambon city in a pre-dawn attack.

One dead and nine injured were taken to the Bakti Rahayu private hospital in Ambon, a doctor there said.

"We have difficulties taking the injured and the dead from Soiya, but reports we have received said that there have been at least 12 people killed there," the doctor, who gave his name as Ginting, told AFP.



PHOTO: AFP

A model displays a bridal outfit from Ritu Kumar's "Summer '02" collection during a fashion show in Mumbai on Saturday. Kumar, a Delhi based designer, introduced her collection under the new brand "LABEL".

46 Maoists surrender in Andhra

AFP, Hyderabad

Forty-six Maoist guerrillas fighting in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh surrendered Sunday, amid hopes of peace talks between the rebels and the local government, officials said.

"They surrendered before the Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu with large quantities of arms and ammunition," a state government spokesman said.

He said the rebels belonged to Jana Shakti, one of the most established Maoist outfits in the state, where three decades of caste-linked insurgency has left more than 10,000 people dead.

18 Maoists killed in Nepal

AFP, Kathmandu

At least 18 Maoist insurgents were killed in a clash in Khotang district, 150 km east of Nepal's capital, police said Sunday.

The deaths, which occurred Saturday afternoon, raise to 35 the total killed since Friday, according to official count.

"At least 18 Maoist terrorists were killed in a clash with security forces at Dorpa-dobela village in Khotang district, on Saturday afternoon," police said.

30 killed in road accident in S India

AFP, New Delhi

At least 30 people, including a newly-wed woman, were killed and 60 others injured in a road accident in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, it was reported Sunday.

The accident occurred when a truck carrying people from a wedding collided head-on with another truck in Andhra Pradesh's Adilabad district late Saturday, the Press Trust of India reported, quoting police sources.

The bride was killed and the groom sustained serious injuries, it said.

10 executed in China

AFP, Beijing

Ten criminals convicted of violent crimes have been executed in eastern China's Shandong province, including two men convicted of the slaughter of a family, state press said Sunday.

Li Jianguo and Zhang Chisen were executed for the axe-and-dagger murder of a family of five on November 11, 2000 in Shiliqian village near Zaozhuang city, the China News Service reported.

The two also stole from the home and raped one of the victims, the report said.

Eight other criminals, convicted of armed robbery and murder, were also executed following a sentencing rally in Zaozhuang, it said.

Israel refuses to give nod to UN's Jenin mission

Al chief arrives in Jenin

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel will refuse to allow the UN mission investigating events in Jenin refugee camp to choose who it wants to interview as witnesses, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres announced Sunday.

"Israel cannot accept the demand by the United Nations mission to decide which military people it will question," Peres told Israeli military radio.

The foreign minister said this matter was currently the "main point of divergence" on the fact-finding mission, waiting in Geneva for the go-ahead Sunday from the weekly meeting of the Israeli cabinet.

He let it be understood that if this objection were overcome, Israel would not block the mission.

He said Israel had obtained the UN's agreement that members of the military would give evidence under cover of anonymity with a guarantee that they would not be pursued for "war crimes."

"Israel is not in the dock, but in the witness stand and should not give the impression of having anything to hide," he emphasised.

He confirmed that seven unarmed Palestinians and 45 armed Palestinians died in fighting in the Jenin refugee camp on the West Bank.

The Palestinians have accused Israel of committing "massacres" in

Jenin and spoken of "hundreds" of dead, while the Israelis have rejected the allegations and said there were at most "dozens" of dead Palestinians, pointing out that they themselves lost 23 soldiers.

Up to now some 50 bodies have been found in the rubble of the ruined camp.

Meanwhile, the secretary general of rights group Amnesty International arrived in Jenin on Sunday to visit the neighbouring refugee camp which was largely destroyed in an Israel assault this month, a spokeswoman said.

Irene Kahn arrived in Israel late Saturday and headed for the camp with legal and military advisers on Sunday, a spokeswoman at the group's offices in Tel Aviv said.

Amnesty last week called for an international inquiry into possible "war crimes" in the battle for the camp, and urged Israel to drop its reservations and allow a UN fact-finding mission into the camp.

Israel rejects Palestinian accusations that it carried out a "massacre" of hundreds of civilians in Jenin, saying its troops killed dozens of die-hard Palestinian fighters in heavy combat.

Strike cripples bomb-hit Pak town

AFP, Multan

A third day of strikes and demonstrations Sunday paralysed a Pakistani town where 12 women and children were killed in a bomb attack on a religious meeting, witnesses said.

Shops were shuttered as people took to the streets of the central Pakistani town of Bhakkar, the scene of a massive blast which tore through a congregation of 10,000 Shiite Muslims late Thursday.

10 killed in Kashmir amid Indo-Pak exchange of fire

AFP, Srinagar

Nine people were killed in separatist-linked violence in Kashmir and a soldier died in an exchange of fire between Indian and Pakistani troops in the disputed region, officials said Sunday.

The Indian army, backed by counter-insurgency troops, shot dead six separatist militants in two encounters overnight near the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border that divides Kashmir between nuclear-armed enemies India and Pakistan, police said.

"The militants had entered into Poonch area from across the LoC," a police spokesman said, adding security forces were searching for three more militants believed to be part of the group.



PHOTO: AFP

A Muslim family stay in a relief camp in Ahmedabad on Saturday as nine more persons were killed and 25 others injured on Sunday in sectarian violence that has already claimed more than 900 lives and continued to rage in India's western state of Gujarat. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said rioters of the western state of Gujarat would not be spared and warned opposition parties against tarnishing the country's image abroad over the continuing bloodbath.

Fresh rioting in Gujarat: 9 killed

AFP, Ahmedabad

Nine people were killed and at least 25 injured in the western Indian state of Gujarat during a fresh burst of sectarian violence that has claimed at least 900 lives in two months, police said Sunday.

Three people were killed in the Maninagar area of the state's commercial capital Ahmedabad when police opened fire to disperse rioting mobs early Sunday morning, a police spokesman said.

Three others were killed in the city's Chadula Talav area late Saturday when rioters burnt down huts.

In Surendranagar district, 100 km east of Ahmedabad, mobs torched more than 20 shops, houses and wayside stalls after a Hindu priest was run over and killed by a Muslim driver, police said.

Another man was stabbed to death and one was shot by police in Baroda district, 150 kilometres (93 miles) from Ahmedabad.

Police fired live rounds and lobbed more than 30 tear-gas shells in Baroda to disperse mobs that went on the rampage. About 25 people were injured.

Arson and stone-throwing were reported from Bharuch district, some 200 km south of Ahmedabad, the police spokesman added.

Hindu-Muslim violence in Gujarat erupted after an alleged Muslim mob on February 27 torched a train carrying Hindu activists, killing 58 people.

Police said Friday the death toll had reached 900. But Western diplomats and international human rights groups have put the toll much higher, at between 2,000 and 3,000.

Defence Minister George Fernandes, accompanied by Law Minister Arun Jaitley and Gujarat's Chief Minister Narendra Modi, began a peace march through Ahmedabad Sunday.

Vajpayee govt braces for censure motion

AFP, New Delhi

India's government, under intense scrutiny for its handling of sectarian riots in the western state of Gujarat, is bracing for a crucial parliamentary vote on the bloodbath.

And although Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee looks likely to defeat the censure motion, the mere fact that parliament is voting on the issue at all is a victory for opposition parties.

Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party-led coalition government initially opposed any censure motion because it feared some of its

allies might vote against it.

But, after the opposition stalled parliament for six days over the issue, deputy speaker P.M. Sayeed ruled last week that the vote would take place.

The government will not be brought down if it loses the vote in parliament's lower house, but a loss will prove embarrassing and could expose fissures in the ruling coalition of two dozen parties.

Vajpayee's BJP also rules in Gujarat state, where the Hindu-Muslim riots have claimed 900 lives since February 27.

Russian politician Lebed killed in helicopter crash

AFP, Moscow

Russian populist politician and former presidential candidate Alexander Lebed died Sunday from injuries sustained when his helicopter



Alexander Lebed

crashed over Siberia,RIA Novosti reported.

Lebed, 51, governor of the Krasnoyarsk region in Siberia, was among 16 people, including three crew members, on board the Mi-8 helicopter which crashed at 0215 GMT after hitting an electric power

line near the region's Lake Olskoye in conditions of poor visibility.

Five other people were killed, while the remaining 10 on board sustained serious injuries and were being treated in a hospital at the nearby town of Abakan, ITAR-TASS reported.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov immediately sent their condolences to Lebed's family and the relatives of the other victims, the NTV television channel said.

Putin also dispatched Russian Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu to the scene of the crash, near Abakan in Krasnoyarsk's Yermakovskoye district, to head a commission investigating the causes of the accident.

Early reports blamed bad weather for the crash of the helicopter, in which the head of the Yermakovskoye district administration Vasily Rogovoy was also travelling.

Lebed and his colleagues were flying to attend the opening ceremony of a new ski centre in Yermakovskoye at the time of the crash.

Millions of landmines plague Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Landmines have claimed hundreds of lives and left many more maimed since the eruption of the violent anti-India rebellion in Indian-administered Kashmir 12 years ago.

Security officials accuse Muslim militant groups of peppering the Kashmir countryside with landmines and homemade explosive devices.

"Landmines are used randomly by the militants as a hit-and-run method against security forces battling them," Kashmir's police chief, Ashok Kumar Suri, said.

"They make use of mines because they are scared of face-to-face fighting."

More than 35,000 people have died in Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, since 1989 when separatist Muslim militants launched a struggle to secede from India, and join neighbouring

Pakistan or remain independent.

Security officials say the situation is not as bad as in Afghanistan where an estimated 10 million landmines are buried, but add the ordinance buried in Kashmir remains a heavy burden on Indian troops.

Security forces have recovered 5,175 anti-personnel mines, 500 anti-tank mines and 4,625 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) from various hideouts since 1989.

A spokesman said Indian troops had recovered more than 1.3 million explosive devices since 1989.

According to police, Kashmir's dominant indigenous group, Hizbul Mujahedin, has been using landmines to target security convoys on the 300-kilometre (186 mile) main Kashmir highway that runs through the Himalayas and connects Kashmir to the outside world.

Next terror attack unavoidable, warns top CIA official

AFP, Washington

A top Central Intelligence Agency official has warned Americans that a new terrorist attack is unavoidable, despite all efforts to prevent it and the fact that the CIA is now "stealing more secrets" than ever.

"Now for the hard truth. Despite the best efforts of so much of the world, the next terrorist attack -- it's not a question of if, it's a question of when," CIA Deputy Director for Operation James Pavitt told an academic conference earlier this

month. "With so many possible targets and an enemy more than willing to die, the perfect defence isn't possible."

Pavitt said mounting foolproof countermeasures against terrorism would require sacrificing many civil liberties, which make American society great, and, as a result, would produce a system that, in his view, "is not worth defending."

The warning was contained in an address delivered by Pavitt, who is in charge of all clandestine operations conducted by the agency, at an

April 11 conference at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. The CIA released its transcript over this weekend.

US law enforcement agencies are already on heightened alert after the Federal Bureau of Investigation has issued at least two terrorism warnings over the past 10 days.

The FBI said it had intelligence about attacks being planned against financial institutions in northeastern US states and against shopping malls.

Musharraf on course to win referendum

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's General Pervez Musharraf is almost certain to win a referendum on extending his presidency but may find himself at odds with a parliament emerging out of October elections, analysts say.

A majority vote in his favour in Tuesday's referendum would give the military leader an extra five years as president starting from the day a parliament emerging from the October polls formally comes into being.

But analysts say Musharraf's controversial mandate could cost him dearly, helping to galvanise and consolidate a fragmented political opposition into forming a hostile parliament.

Opposition groups have condemned the referendum as unconstitutional, however few doubt victory is

assured for the military leader.

They say Musharraf, who seized power in a bloodless coup in 1999 and appointed himself president last June, will be able to capitalise on popular reforms to sail comfortably to victory.

"The referendum scheme has been designed in such a way that it is impossible for him to lose. Surely he will win," said writer and political commentator Mohammad Afzal Niazi.

About half of Pakistan's largely illiterate 140-million population will be entitled to stamp their mark on the referendum ballot papers, which link the vote to a continuation of reforms, the restoration of democracy and a clampdown on religious extremism and sectarianism.

US forces try to halt fierce fighting in E Afghanistan

AFP, Bagram Air Base

US forces based in the troubled eastern Afghan province of Paktia have held talks with rival warlords in a bid to halt clashes which are feared to have left more than 100 dead or injured, US sources said Sunday.

Rockets have been raining down on the provincial capital Gardez since the early hours of Saturday killing at least 25 and injuring 80 according to the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP).

Witnesses told the Pakistan-based agency that troops loyal to ousted governor Padsha Khan were attacking the centre of the town with heavy artillery and tanks in an attempt to regain control of the area from provincial governor Taj Mohammad Wardak.

Khan, an ethnic Pashtun warlord, tried to storm Gardez in January after interim Afghan cabinet leader Hamid Karzai appointed him governor of Paktia to replace the former Taliban rulers.

But Saif Ullah, the leader of the local shura, or council, routed Khan's forces in fierce fighting which left some 50 people dead, including

20 civilians.

Karzai blamed the fighting on Khan and appointed Wardak, from northern Badakshan province, as the new governor but Khan has never accepted the decision and has been mustering his forces ever since.

AIP said Sunday that Wardak had accused Khan of committing a major crime by launching an attack against forces of the local tribal council, giving him a 10-day ultimatum to begin negotiations or face a full counter-attack.

US sources told AFP that the reported casualty figures were roughly in line with its own intelligence reports.

The United States has a forward operating base in Gardez which is understood to include special forces and regular troops.

One US source told AFP that talks had taken place separately with Padsha Khan and Wardak.

Spokesman Major Bryan Hilferty confirmed that "we are in conversation with some of the leaders", without giving details.

"We are a little bit involved with the people there to try to calm down

the situation and make sure it can be secured," Hilferty added.

But Wardak has ruled out US intervention, AIP said.

"I will not invite American soldiers to join the fighting, nor would I seek their help," he reportedly said.

"If we fail to defend our poor people, it would mean there is no government here and in that case I would prefer to resign."

US troops came under attack in Gardez from suspected al-Qaida and Taliban forces about two weeks ago although there were no injuries.

Coalition forces have been concentrating their search for al-Qaida and Taliban in southeastern Afghanistan where the population has traditionally been seen as sympathetic to the extremists' cause.

But Hilferty said that the latest attacks did not appear to be aimed at coalition troops.

"If there are rockets anywhere near us, then we are in danger, but they do not seem to be aimed at us. If rockets just shoot over our heads it is hard to say that they are aimed at us."

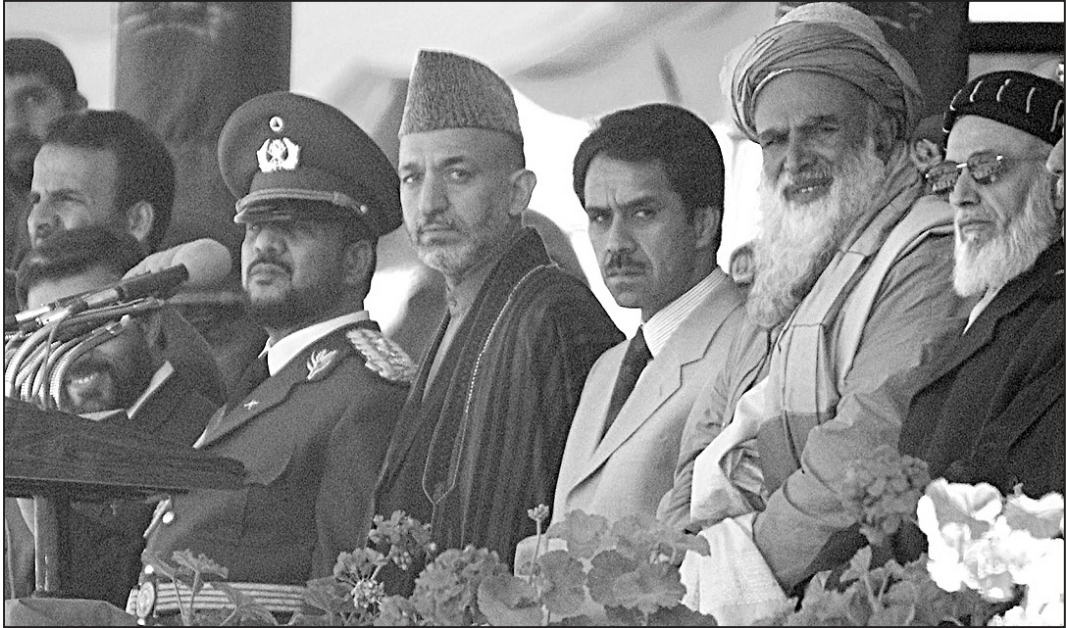


PHOTO: AFP

From left to right: Afghan Defence Minister Fahim Khan, Afghan Interim leader Hamid Kharzai, Wali Masood, brother of slain northern alliance leader Ahmed Shah Masood, Afghan warlord Abdulrab Rasul Sayaf, and former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, review Afghan troops during Mujahedin Victory Day in Kabul on Sunday. The military parade celebrated the Mujahedin's taking of Kabul in 1992, spelling the end of Najibullah's Communist-backed regime.