

Kashmir attack heinous crime: Vajpayee US calls for an end to infiltration

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee Wednesday said an attack by Islamic militants on a bus and army camp in Kashmir which killed 34 people was a "heinous crime".

Vajpayee told the lower house of parliament: "The whole House is one on the issue... This was a heinous crime... We have to condemn it."

He offered to call an all-party meeting to discuss Tuesday's attack in which three Muslim militants opened fire on a civilian bus in Kashmir and then stormed the residential quarters of a nearby Indian army camp.

The dead included 18 women and children who were killed at the camp near Kashmir's Hindu-majority winter capital Jammu, besides seven bus passengers and the three rebels.

The attack, the deadliest against the army in Kashmir in the past year,

came just hours after US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca arrived in New Delhi to urge the Indian leadership to cool tempers with Pakistan.

Meanwhile, a senior US official Wednesday warned infiltration by Muslim militants into Indian Kashmir must stop, as Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes visited the site where 33 people died in a gruesome attack.

Rocca, who was due to head to Islamabad later Wednesday after a two-day visit to India, said Tuesday's assault on a bus and army post in Kashmir was a "barbaric" attack.

"Acts like this are intended to undermine peace in the region. I think acts that occurred in Jammu are terrorism. No matter what the levels are, infiltration must stop," Rocca told a press conference.

"Terrorism is something that is unacceptable whether in India or Pakistan. This is absolutely unacceptable," she added.

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PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani Foreign Secretary Inamul Haq (R) receives US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca for talks in Islamabad on Wednesday. Rocca arrived in Pakistan for talks on the military standoff with New Delhi a day after a bloody militant attack on Indian forces in Kashmir. At left is US Ambassador to Pakistan Wendy Chamberlin.

India gives nod to army regiment to operate Agni

AFP, New Delhi

India said Wednesday it had given the green light to set up an army regiment to operate the intermediate-range nuclear-capable Agni ballistic missile.

"The government has approved

"in principle" the raising of an Agni Missile Group for the army," Defence Minister George Fernandes told

MPs in a written statement from the upper house of parliament.

The Agni, or Fire, missile can

deliver a one-tonne nuclear warhead

to a distance of up to 2,500 kilo-

metres (1,550 miles) and can be

launched within 15 minutes.

Last year, the defence ministry

approved a variant of the Agni mis-

sile to be mass produced for induction

into the Indian army.

Bush names

Clinton to lead

team to E Timor

inauguration

AFP, Washington

President George W. Bush

announced Tuesday that he had

named his predecessor, Bill Clinton,

to lead the US delegation to the

inauguration of East Timor's first

president, Xanana Gusmao.

"Former President Bill Clinton,

will serve as the leader of the delegation," the White House said in a statement.

UN Secretary General Kofi

Annan will swear in Gusmao and

declare the territory independent in

a ceremony on the night of May 19

as the clock strikes midnight.

The US delegation will also

include the former US ambassador to the United Nations, Richard Holbrooke; Assistant Secretary of State for Asian Pacific Affairs James Kelly; Karen Brooks, National Security Council Director for Asian Affairs.

UN hails polls in

Sierra Leone

AFP, Freetown

The United Nations Mission in

Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) on

Tuesday hailed landmark elections in the war-ravaged country west African country as "exemplary."

Stressing that no violence and a

high turnout marked Sierra Leone's

presidential and parliamentary polls

the first elections since the end of

a brutal 10-year civil war --

UNAMSIL chief Oluwemi Adeniji

said everything had gone off

smoothly.

"Our consensus is that the

organisation of the elections had

been extremely well done in all the

areas," Adeniji, Special

Representative of UN Secretary

General Kofi Annan, told a news

conference here.

The plane took off for Amsterdam at 6:50 am (0450 GMT).

Lawyer Toma Fila told reporters that his client, Mile Mrksic, an ex-officer in the former Yugoslavia's army, would board the same plane in order to

surrender to the UN war crimes tribunal.

Mrksic is the only one of three suspects indicted for war crimes in the eastern Croatian town of Vukovar in 1991 who has decided to surrender.

Mile, 56, is a former police chief who became the head of the breakaway Serb republic of Krajina towards the end of the 1991-95 Croatian war.

Croatian Serbs surrender to war crimes court

AFP, The Hague

Two ethnic Serbs indicted for war crimes over the Croatian war of the 1990's surrendered to the UN court in The Hague on Wednesday and were placed in detention, a court spokesman said.

Mile Martic and Mile Mrksic were detained after arriving on the same plane from Belgrade to hand themselves in to the court.

Martic, who served as president of the short-lived Serb Republic of Krajina (RSK), is indicted for ordering an attack on the Croatian capital Zagreb, and Mrksic is one of three former officials indicted for the 1991 destruction of the Croatian town of Vukovar.

Earlier reports say, Croatian Serb wartime leader Milan Martic and an ex-Yugoslav army officer, both indicted for war crimes committed during Croatia's 1992-95 war, flew out of Belgrade Wednesday on their way to surrender to the UN tribunal in The Hague.

"I am not guilty, I am going to fight for the truth about my people... I am going there proudly. If that is the court of justice, I will be back here," Martic told reporters before he boarded the plane.

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Myanmar ethnic groups want to join reconciliation talks

AFP, Yangon

ciliation will succeed in as much as the tri-party talks are successful."

The SNLD statement represented political parties of the Shan, Mon, Zomi (Chin), Karen and Arakanese ethnic minorities within the country's borders, it said.

Several minority groups have waged armed struggles against Myanmar's four-decade military rule, while many have signed shaky ceasefire agreements with the junta.

"We welcome this development and hope that such meaningful dialogue will commence soon," they said in a statement.

"In this period of the dawning of a new day, we, the political parties of the national groups, declare that we will take on any responsibilities assigned to us towards establishing national reconciliation which is inevitably needed."

"Development of national recon-

Arafat bows to int'l pressure, calls for PA overhaul

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat on Wednesday bowed to international pressure and called for a complete overhaul of his Palestinian Authority, while personally shouldering the blame for unpopular deals to break the Israeli siege of his compound.

"I will present a new formula for the administration of the Palestinian Authority and its ministries and security apparatus in order to rebuild it on a firmer basis," he told a special parliamentary session.

"We want to totally separate the judicial, executive and parliamentary branches," he said.

"We must prepare for elections and prepare for reforms. But let me have some time to prepare for that," he said.

Arafat said he was still dedicated to peace as a strategic option.

"Peace was and will remain our strategic option. I will never give it away between us and the Israelis, because peace is in our joint interest," he said.

Arafat, speaking on the 54th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel, a day known as the "catastrophe" to Palestinians, also took personal responsibility for highly unpopular deals that ended the sieges at his offices and Bethlehem's Nativity Church by the Israeli army.

"I am fully responsible -- do not blame anyone but myself. But whatever happened, happened based on international guarantees," he told the assembled deputies.

But he said reforms, already called for by the international community,

Israel, and many of his own ministers and security chiefs, were much needed to in the current crisis.

"We are now badly in need of re-evaluation of our policies and our plans, in order to repair our errors, to correct our march toward independence," which remains the Palestinian goal, said Arafat, speaking in a measured tone and occasionally laughing. Palestinian ministers have been increasingly calling for an overhaul ever since the end of Israel's devastating invasion of West Bank towns and cities throughout April in the wake of a series of bloody Palestinian suicide bombings.

The operation rocked the Palestinian Authority to the core, after its security forces proved incapable of offering any sustained resistance and its administration all but collapsed.

The United States has been calling for reforms, in particular to bring the various sprawling security branches under a unified control.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who addressed his own parliament the day before, said there could be no peace talks with the "corrupt and dictatorial" Palestinian Authority until it carried out fundamental reforms.

Israel says the PA is riven with corruption and alleges that documents seized during its invasion of Ramallah show direct links between the authority -- and Arafat himself -- and radical groups which have persistently attacked Israel.

Sharon presented the documentation to US President George W. Bush during a state visit to Washington a week ago.

Israel's initial reaction to Arafat's speech was dismissive.

India gives nod to army regiment to operate Agni

AFP, Washington

The United States had evidence the Pakistani military was preparing a nuclear strike against India in 1999, as the two nation's armies were locked in a pitched battle in the disputed region of Kashmir, a former White House official acknowledged.

The revelations by Bruce Riedel, a former special assistant to former president Bill Clinton, also leave open the possibility these preparations were being made behind Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's back by then-armed forces commander General Pervez Musharraf.

In an academic paper prepared for the Center for the Advanced Study of India at University of Pennsylvania, Riedel described Musharraf, the current Pakistani president, as a man who "seemed to be in a different mold" than Sharif.

"He was said to be a hardliner on Kashmir, a man

who has presided over the arrest of

more than 60 militants allegedly

linked to Osama bin Laden's al-

Qaeda network, said that terrorists

would find no haven in his country.

"We do not tolerate their pres-

sure. We give them no rest, no

quarter, no place to hide," he

declared at a dinner attended by

policy makers, academics and

business leaders.

"We have adequate laws and

capacity to deal with such threats

and we have much expertise in this field," he added.

Mahathir's visit is a sign of the

changes wrought in US foreign

policy by the September attacks --

he added.

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