

Indian police to disclose details of mall shootout

AFP, New Delhi

Police bowed to pressure yesterday and agreed to offer to India's national human rights panel a blow-by-blow account of a purported gunbattle at a mall that left two suspected Muslim militants dead.

The autonomous rights watchdog had ordered the Delhi Police department to give its version of the weekend shootout at the upmarket Ansal Plaza shopping arcade following complaints that the two men were killed in cold blood.

Police Commissioner RS Gupta in a letter to panel's chief investigator, YN Srivastava, agreed to furnish within a week a full account of the shootout that occurred Sunday when the plaza was packed with 2,000 shoppers.

"We have assured the commission that the full details of the encounter will be submitted to the commission within a week," a Delhi police official said.

The police chief in his letter also assured the national panel that security was being provided to a civilian --- who claims to be the only witness to the shootout --- in line with orders of the constitutional human rights body.

Witness Hari Krishna in a complaint to the commission had said that the two suspected militants, aged between 20 and 25 years, were unarmed when they were mowed down by a crack anti-terrorism police team.

The commission stepped into the controversy late Wednesday when member of parliament Kuldip Nayar and a journalist lodged a complaint to the rights body, raising doubts over the police version of events.

Newspapers, which had begun the week questioning police accounts of the shootout, were by Thursday barely stopping short of saying it had been staged to boost the image of the counter-insurgency unit.

Police claim they had been tipped off to militants from the pan-Islamic Lashkar-e-Taiba guerrilla group who planned to attack a target in Delhi on the eve of Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights.



PHOTO: AFP

A soldier looks out over Tiananmen Square a day before the Communist Party Congress in Beijing yesterday. Security is tight as China makes its final preparations for its long-awaited 16th Party Congress.

Zardari viewed as key to breaking Pakistan crisis

AFP, Islamabad

All eyes were focussed on the jailed spouse of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto yesterday, as the two-day old alliance of Islamists and secular opposition parties against Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf showed signs of folding.

Bhutto's husband Asif Ali Zardari is at the centre of back-room wheeling and dealing by Musharraf's supporters to wean Bhutto's party back from its deal with the Islamic bloc and into a coalition with the pro-regime parties, officials involved in the deal-making have told AFP.

Musharraf's decision late Wednesday to postpone the inauguration of the parliament elected four weeks ago was widely seen as

a move to buy time to stymie the anti-Musharraf coalition. Bhutto loyalists in her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) have said privately that they would only side with the Musharraf-backed parties if Zardari was released from six years' custody, and that graft charges against Bhutto were dropped to allow her to return freely from self-imposed exile.

Zardari, accused of gross corruption while he was a member of his wife's cabinet, is due to appear before an accountability court for a bail hearing later Thursday in one of a raft of corruption cases against him. Senior politicians from both the pro- and anti-Musharraf camps have said he is expected to win bail and be released into house arrest in Islamabad on medical grounds, under a deal moving

closer to finalisation.

The deal, however, involves concessions from the former first couple which may include the surrender of some assets by Zardari and Bhutto staying away from Pakistan for another two years. The two time former premier, dismissed twice on corruption charges in 1990 and 1996, took herself into exile in 1998 and has been living between London and Dubai ever since.

Musharraf, the army chief who seized power in a 1999 coup, has pledged repeatedly to block her return to the political arena, accusing her of looting Pakistan during her terms in power. Leaders of the Islamic bloc which Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) had promised to support have lost

Beijing detains dissidents ahead of congress

46 executed in two days, says Amnesty

AFP, REUTERS, Beijing

A leading Chinese political dissident has been arrested and several others are being kept under 24-hour police guard as China prepares for its crucial Communist Party Congress, dissidents and supporters said Wednesday.

He Depu, a member of the banned China Democracy Party (CDP), was detained earlier this week and taken to a police station in handcuffs, according to He Xintong, the wife of jailed CDP founder Xu Wenli.

"His wife called me and told me police officers took him away this week without any explanation," He Xintong said.

He Depu was among almost 200 Chinese political dissidents who issued a petition Wednesday urging the Communist Party meeting, due to begin Friday in central Beijing, to allow reforms including greater democracy and the release of prisoners of conscience.

It was unclear whether He's detention was connected to the petition. He is regularly taken out of Beijing during sensitive times, such as the anniversary of the bloody 1989 crackdown on Tiananmen democracy protests.

But in the past, he was not taken away by handcuffs and not to the police station, He Xintong said. He Depu's wife could be reached for comment. He Xintong said she has also come under intense police scrutiny, adding police had followed her everywhere since mid-October.

Meanwhile, Amnesty International claimed China had executed 46

people in just two days last week following calls to intensify the fight against crime ahead of a pivotal Communist Party Congress.

Twenty-nine people were executed in the southwest city of Chongqing and on southern island of Hainan last Wednesday while 17 were executed in the town of Pingdingshan in the central province of Henan two days later, Amnesty said in statement.

No immediate comment was available from Chinese officials. The executions followed recent calls by the authorities to intensify a national "Strike Hard" anti-crime campaign that began in April 2001, Amnesty said.

Reports of death sentences and executions have peppered state media in recent months ahead of the congress, due to introduce a younger line-up of Chinese leaders after it begins Friday.

This week, a court in the northeastern city of Changchun sentenced to death or prison 36 members of a gang for murder and other crimes, Xinhua reported on its Web site www.xinhuanet.com. The sentences were handed down after the gang terrorized the city of Jiutai in the northeastern province of Jilin, where they killed one person, injured others and stole more than \$93,000, it said.

Amnesty appealed to the Chinese government to end the death penalty in the world's most populous country, where it said 2,468 people were executed last year.

Six hurt in riot-torn Gujarat

AFP, Ahmedabad

Six people were injured overnight in communal violence in the western Indian state of Gujarat, where sectarian riots earlier this year killed more than 1,000 people, police said yesterday.

Trouble began Wednesday when a group of Muslims protested against Hindus lighting firecrackers in the Jamaalpur area of Gujarat's commercial capital of Ahmedabad, on the occasion of the Hindu festival of lights, Diwali, a police spokesman said.

Though Diwali was celebrated all over the country on Monday, festivities generally start some days before the festival and carry on for a few days.

The heated exchange of words soon developed into a riot with both sides throwing stones and indulging in arson, gutting shops, houses and vehicles, he said.

Execution of Pakistani in Virginia US State Dept fears reprisal

REUTERS, Washington

The State Department warned Americans Wednesday that the execution next week of a Pakistani convicted of murdering two CIA employees could trigger retaliatory attacks on US interests overseas.

The worldwide caution cited the scheduled November 14 execution in Virginia of Mir Ahmad Kasi, convicted five years ago in the 1993 murders of two CIA employees, as cause for extra vigilance.

"The potential exists for retaliatory acts against US or other foreign interests in response to the execution," the State Department said.

"These may include facilities where Americans or possibly other foreigners are generally known to congregate or visit, such as residential areas, clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools, hotels, outdoor recreation events or resorts and beaches."

It said increased security in the United States, put in place after the Sept. 11 attacks in New York and Washington, had made overseas targets more attractive to attackers.

"Attacks on places of worship and schools, and the murders of private American citizens and other Westerners, demonstrate that as security is increased at official US facilities, terrorists and their sympathisers will seek softer targets," it said. Kasi, also known as Mir Aimal Kansi, was convicted of killing Lansing Bennett, 66, a physician and intelligence analyst, and Frank Darling, 28, an undercover agent, in a shooting spree with an AK-47 assault rifle outside CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Three other people were wounded.

Night curfew in Indian Kashmir relaxed for Ramadan

AFP, Srinagar

A night-time curfew in Indian-administered Kashmir has been relaxed to facilitate prayers by Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan that began Thursday, a government statement said.

"The night restrictions have been relaxed in order to facilitate trouble-free prayers in mosques and other places during the holy month of Ramadan," the statement said.

Army and para-military forces have been imposing a strict curfew between 8:00 pm to 6:00 am in most of the hilly and border areas of the state.

"The curfew will now remain in force between 10:00 pm and 3.30 am," the statement said. Security officials say the curfew restrictions help them in detecting the movement of Muslims rebels who cross into Indian Kashmir from Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Officials said the decision to relax the curfew was taken during a 45-minute meeting between an Indian army officer in charge of north India and Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed on Wednesday.

Diana's ex-butler blasts the Spencers

AFP, London

Princess Diana's ex-butler Paul Burrell, acquitted of stealing hundreds of her belongings, has launched a scathing attack on her 'blood family' the Spencers, in an exclusive interview with a British newspaper published yesterday.

Diana's mother and elder sister testified against Burrell during his trial prior to its collapse last week after a dramatic intervention by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II.

Burrell told the Daily Mirror that the Spencer family was "jealous" and "hypocritical" in its treatment of Diana before and after her death in a car crash in Paris in 1997.

"The Spencers found Diana unacceptable in life. But after her death they found her very acceptable at ten pounds fifty pence a ticket (16.5 dollars/euros)," Burrell said in reference to the cost of visiting Diana's grave at the family's Althorp estate in central England.

Burrell labelled Diana's brother Charles Spencer a "hypocrite" for the speech he made at the princess' funeral. "How could he be so hypocritical in God's house? This



PHOTO: INTERNET

Spencers... "jealous", "hypocritical" in treatment of Princess Di?

was the Spencer family who didn't want Diana in life, but were claiming her in death." In his disclosures to The Mirror, Burrell also slammed Diana's mother Frances Shand Kydd for trying to have him convicted of theft.

"I just thought: 'What have I done to deserve such destruction from you?'"

Burrell revealed details of the unhealed six-month rift between

Diana and her mother before the princess' death. He said it happened because of a phone call between mother and daughter, in which Kydd, 66, attacked Diana for keeping company with Muslim men.

"It was horrible. She was using the kind of language you would never expect to hear a mother say to a daughter... It was a hate-filled, personal attack on the type of men

the princess surrounded herself with and their religious beliefs." Diana's Muslim companion Dodi Al Fayed died with her in the Paris car crash.

Other British newspapers threw doubt Thursday on the former butler's story, in particular the fact that Burrell's meeting with the queen lasted for three hours.

Courtiers said it was inconceivable that the meeting lasted three hours, pointing out that Prime Minister Tony Blair only gets an hour for his audiences, The Daily Mail said.

"Paul Burrell's version is beginning to sound like the first ramblings of a madman," one courtier said in The Sun tabloid, against whom Burrell won an injunction Tuesday.

The legal notice prevents the newspaper publishing further disclosures from statements he made about Diana, Princess of Wales during his prosecution. If it (Burrell's audience with the queen) lasted longer than three minutes it would be a big surprise," one royal insider said of the November 1997 meeting, according to the paper.

A senior member of the

Buckingham Palace staff was also quoted in the paper, saying: "I am very doubtful that she saw him for three hours. She does not even see her own husband (Prince Philip) for three hours."

The ex-butler also had harsh words for Diana's sister Sarah McCorquodale, who also testified against Burrell.

She told court that Burrell had not been important enough to the princess to merit more than a pair of cufflinks to remember her by.

"I was absolutely devastated when I heard that," said Burrell, who added that after Diana's death, McCorquodale and Kydd ordered him to destroy the princess' lingerie and swim wear.

"Jealousy was rife within the family. After all, the princess -- the youngest child -- achieved more in her short lifetime than the rest put together," he told the Mirror.

Burrell, 44, was acquitted at London's Old Bailey criminal court after the queen confirmed the ex-butler had told her of his intention to retain some of the princess's papers for safekeeping after her death.

Child servant turns topper in school

TIMES NEWS NETWORK, Kolkata

Every morning she walks to school clutching a school bag, her uniform starched and ironed. Nothing unusual about this. She is also a topper in her school the Baptist Mission Bengali Medium School at Entally. Nothing unusual about that either. Only, nineyear-old Mou Mondol till the other day was a child servant at a posh Alipore flat.

Two years ago Mou had hit the headlines when her employers locked her up in their flat and went off on a holiday to Bangalore.

Frightened and distraught, Mou banged on the door all night, waking up the neighbours. In the morning, the police broke open the flat and rescued her. Later the Alipore police handed her over to an NGO, Parichiti, to find her a suitable home.

Mou was put into a Bengali medium school rather than enrol her in Loreto Sealdah because "Mou was already a grown up kid when she came to me and was not as comfortable with English as she was with her mother tongue."

'Anti-Semitic' serial on Egypt TV

BBC NEWS ONLINE

Egyptian television has begun airing a controversial series denounced by the US and Israel as anti-Semitic.

Two Egyptian television stations started broadcasting the 41-part Horseman Without A Horse across the Arab world on Wednesday night.

"Prejudging a work of art, a dramatic series, before seeing the actual production is simply an immature unintelligent attitude", said

Government spokesman Nabil Osman.

The series is billed as a chronicle of the Arab struggle against colonial rule and against the establishment of the state of Israel.

But it includes a sub-plot involving a forged document - the Protocols of the Elders of Zion - describing an alleged Jewish plot for world domination, which was used by the Nazis as a pretext for the Holocaust.

The United States complained to Egypt and asked other Middle East countries not to allow the relay of the broadcast to their populations.

But Egyptian officials denied that the series contained anything against Jewish people in general.

Government spokesman Nabil

Osman told critics to reserve their condemnation until they had seen the programmes, which hit the screens on the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan - traditionally the peak viewing time in Egypt.

Historians believe the Protocols of the Elders of Zion were fabricated by anti-Semites in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century.

The document was later used in Nazi Germany and other parts of Europe as a pretext for persecuting

Jews.

Last week, US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said Egypt should steer clear of the "odious protocols".

The State Department became involved after the US-based Jewish pressure group, the Anti-Defamation League, wrote to it, describing the series as the "latest manifestation of an ongoing pattern of anti-Semitic incitement in the Egyptian media".



PHOTO: INTERNET

Poster of 'Horseman without a Horse' which created controversy in Egypt.