

One killed as police open fire on Kabul students

AFP, Kabul

Police yesterday opened fire on several thousand students protesting in the Afghan capital against authorities' handling of an earlier university riot in which at least one student was killed.

The protests marked the first major demonstration in the city since it was liberated from the hardline Taliban regime almost exactly one year ago by a US-led military campaign.

Crowds shouting "death to the student killers" charged riot police armed with batons and water cannon. The students retaliated with stones, prompting police to open fire initially in the air and then into the crowds, an AFP correspondent witnessed at the scene.

Din Mohammad Jurat, the interior ministry's director of public order, told reporters at the Kabul university campus that shots had not been aimed at the students.

"The students are our brothers. We tried to calm down the situation. There were just a small number of problem-creating elements.

"We haven't fired at the students today. We just fired in the air to

control the situation."

Police were also seen beating several students with batons. At least three were carried away with severe head injuries.

The students had taken to the streets in protest at police handling of a demonstration late Monday against a lack of power, water and food at the university's dormitories.

Interior Minister Taj Mohammad Wardak said at least one student died in the Monday protest when police and soldiers were called in to break up a rock-throwing crowd.

Officials said another seven were injured, including two military personnel.

A spokesman for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) which patrols Kabul confirmed one person died in Monday's uprising.

"Sadly several people were injured and it appears at least one person was killed," Major Gordon Mackenzie said.

"By coincidence there were some ISAF troops nearby when the protest began, but while they carefully followed events, they did not get directly involved."

One student, who did not wish to

be identified, said the demonstrators were only asking why conditions could not be improved.

"We asked them a logical question: why did not improve conditions? They answered us with bullets," he said.

Wardak said an investigation had been ordered into the Monday night riot and the conditions in which the students were living.

"Their big mistake was to stage their protest at night. This has never happened before in the history of Kabul. They threw rocks at everything, every car in the area," he said.

Afghanistan's education ministry earlier ordered that medical students would shortly have to sit end-of-year exams, despite appeals to delay the tests because of recent bad weather.

Some 3,000 students, mostly from the country's poor outlying provinces, have protested that without electricity they are unable to study at night or keep warm in the large, poorly insulated university dormitories.

The Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which started last week, has added to problems since stu-

dents have no power to heat the little food they have before beginning or after breaking their traditional daily fast.

Kabul has been hit by a series of student protests since last year's fall of the fundamentalist Taliban, under which education was severely restricted, forcing many Afghans to pursue their studies abroad.

A demonstration was staged in early October by medical students complaining that qualifications gained in Pakistan were not being recognised by Afghan education authorities.

Afzal Aman, deputy chief of Kabul's garrison, said the latest uprising may have been inflamed by infiltrators belonging to the Taliban or the al-Qaeda terror network of Osama bin Laden.

"Inshallah (God willing) there is not any political reason for this demonstration. Of course, during the Taliban time there were lots of people studying here who were trained to fight by al-Qaeda.

"Maybe there are a number here who will use the situation to their benefit."



Afghan police arrest two students during a protest outside Kabul university yesterday. At least one person was killed and seven injured in a night-time student riot on Monday against poor conditions at Afghanistan's main university.

Infighting kills 4 Assam rebels

AFP, Guwahati

At least four tribal separatists were killed and three injured in clashes between two rival rebel groups in India's restive northeastern state of Assam, officials said yesterday.

A police spokesman said heavily armed militants of the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) Monday attacked a village in the northern district of Mangaldoi, 120 kilometres (74 miles) from Assam's state capital Guwahati.

"Four Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) members were killed and three received bullet injuries during the raid," the police official said.

The NDFB, fighting for an independent homeland for the Bodo tribe, operates out of bases inside the Himalayan Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan to carry out guerrilla strikes in Assam. The kingdom has warned the rebels to leave.

The BLT, unlike other rebel groups operating in Assam, is not fighting for secession but a homeland for the Bodo tribals within the Indian union.

It has been observing a ceasefire with New Delhi since March 2000 and has agreed to the creation of a Bodoland Territorial Council which would give more executive and legislative powers for the 1.6 million tribals.

"The attack by the NDFB is seen as a desperate attempt to derail the peace process and create a sense of panic and confusion in Bodo dominated areas in Assam," Rabiram Narzary, president of the All Bodo Students' Union, told AFP.



An aerial photo shows damage to homes in Carbon Hill, Alabama after multiple tornadoes raced through the state and southeastern United States late November 10. Some 35 people were reported dead in the southeastern US, hundreds missing and entire communities flattened in the tornadoes' wakes.

Fresh student protests in Iran

AFP, Tehran

Students supporting Iran's embattled reform movement stepped up their protests Tuesday, despite a threat from supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to intervene in the country's spiralling political crisis with "popular force".

At least 3,000 students gathered at Tehran's university campus chanting slogans including "death to despotism", on the fourth day of protests sparked by the sentencing to death for blasphemy of a popular academic and ally of President Mohammad Khatami.

But the demonstrations have been taking a more overtly political

tone, with some students also chanting: "Death to the Taliban, in Kabul and Tehran," and slogans lambasting the hardline judiciary and powerful former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Police were seen by an AFP journalist preventing the students from moving outside the campus and onto the streets. Late on Monday, the all-powerful Khamenei said he may resort to "popular force" to end a mounting crisis between the Islamic republic's reformist and conservative camps.

"The day when the three branches of government are unable to settle major problems, the supreme guide will, if he deems it

necessary, make popular force intervene," state television quoted Khamenei as saying late Monday.

"I hope that will never happen," Iran's Revolutionary Guards, the Basij and other hardline militia are frequently referred to as "popular forces", and when called upon can easily smash pro-reform protests.

Khamenei's comments came amid intensifying wrangling which has seen leading reformers arrested or handed draconian sentences by the conservative-dominated judiciary, and the courts in turn coming under unprecedented attack.

Subdued Israeli response to kibbutz killing

No bloodshed, no arrest in latest incursion

AFP, Jerusalem

After dire threats to expel Yasser Arafat in answer to an attack on a kibbutz, Israel's new right-wing leadership opted yesterday for a modest military response, reflecting US constraints and marking a victory for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon against the bombast of his new ministers.

After Sunday night's attack by an armed offshoot of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Fatah on the pacifist kibbutz of Metzger, the Palestinians were bracing for the worst as the new defence minister Shaul Mofaz - known for his tough stance when he

was army chief - mulled his response.

But a day later, the consequences of the Metzger kibbutz shooting spree - which shocked an opinion more accustomed to such attacks on hardline Jewish settlements inside the Palestinian territories - were minor in contrast to previous retaliations.

Some 20 Israeli armoured vehicles staged a brief incursion into the Tulkarem Palestinian refugee camp where Israeli security services believe the assailant was from and destroyed the house of the suspected mastermind in a nearby village, but there were no reports of

any injuries. The army left the camp at dawn without arresting anyone.

A series of heavy-handed military operations since March, in which scores of Palestinians civilians were killed, had drawn rare rebukes from Israel's US ally.

After Labour's exit from Sharon's national unity government, the cabinet's swing to the right has been tempered by the standoff between the prime minister and his new hawkish foreign minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, both vying for the leadership of their Likud party in upcoming primaries.

With Labour out, Sharon is

suddenly seen as the most moderate element in his government and following the attack on Metzger, a traditional haven for Israelis advocating dialogue and good relations with their Palestinian neighbours, the right-wing ex-general could be courting the other end of the political spectrum.

The kibbutzniks themselves demanded the government exercise restraint following the attack in which they lost five of their own, including two children.

And uncharacteristically, Sharon and Mofaz both attended the funeral Monday afternoon.

Putin visits India from Dec 3

ANN, New Delhi

Russian President Vladimir Putin, will visit India for three days from December 3 to fulfil a commitment made when he met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Almaty earlier this year and further strengthen the Indo-Russian strategic dialogue.

This will be Putin's second visit since the NDA government came to power and is expected to firm up strategic cooperation, especially on the anti-terrorism front.

Both Putin and Vajpayee met in June at Almaty for the first-ever Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

Prior to Putin's visit, Russia's Industry and S&T minister Ilya Klebanov will visit New Delhi to finetune details of the president's visit, besides co-chairing meetings of the Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission for Trade Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation, the external affairs ministry spokesperson said.

'Let go of army chief's post'

Islamist party tells Musharraf

AFP, Islamabad

Islamists have laid down their demands to Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf, telling him they would support him in a future government if he quit his post as army chief.

The proposal was made to General Musharraf by a chief Islamic party leader late Monday in the military ruler's first official meeting with a politician since last month's polls resulted in a hung parliament and a month-long stalemate in forming a government.

"I told him... we are ready to accept him as a civilian president," Qazi Hussain Ahmed, vice president of the newly-powerful Islamic

party alliance Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) told reporters after two-hour talks with Musharraf.

Ahmed said he discussed the Islamists' reservations about certain constitutional amendments, which award Musharraf sweeping powers to sack parliament and give the military a permanent place in politics through a National Security Council. He said Musharraf must also ratify his position through the constitutionally demanded election process, in which the national and provincial parliaments and the senate choose the president.

"I told Musharraf we have rejected the presidential referendum and without a presidential election in accordance with the

constitution he has no position," Ahmed said.

"We would be ready to accept him as president if he comes through a constitutional process."

The MMA landed the balance of power after huge gains in October 10 elections secured them 59 of the parliament's 342 seats, in which a 172-seat majority is required to form government.

No single party came close to the majority, and the two biggest seat winners, the pro-Musharraf Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) and opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP), both need the MMA on side to rule.

70 migrants holed up in Calais church

AFP, Calais

Around 70 migrants continued to occupy a church in the northern French port of Calais Tuesday morning, rejecting a new government policy to disperse them in holding centres around the country.

Riot police surrounded the Saint Pierre - Saint Paul church, but Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy told RTL radio they would not evacuate the building by force unless asked to by church authorities.

The migrants -- mainly Iraqi Kurds -- are among those turned away from the nearby Sangatte Red Cross centre after it was closed to new arrival last week under an agreement between the French and British governments.

Local politicians and church leaders have been trying to persuade the migrants to accept the government's offer of shelter in other parts of France, but they are reluctant to give up their hopes of crossing from Calais to England.

On their third night in the church, conditions for the migrants were becoming very disagreeable - with no electricity or toilets - and local charity workers said it was unlikely they would hold out for much longer.

About 30 of the migrants agreed to leave the church Monday evening and were taken away by coach.

Meanwhile 12 elected representatives from the Calais region - including the town's Communist mayor Jacky Henin - met Sarkozy at the interior ministry in Paris to discuss the repercussions of the closure of the Sangatte centre.

Situated about one mile (1.5 kilometres) outside the port, Sangatte has for three years served as a base for tens of thousands of asylum-seekers heading to Britain, but it was made off-limits to new arrivals a week ago.

Royal crisis puts Charles under pressure

AFP, London

Britain's Prince Charles was under pressure yesterday to order an unprecedented independent inquiry into the sensational collapse of the trial of Princess Diana's butler and allegations of a royal cover-up of an alleged homosexual rape.

The Times newspaper said the heir to the throne -- under pressure from Queen Elizabeth II, who this year has been celebrating 50 years as monarch -- could be forced to announce an inquiry before the weekend.

"The prince has to ensure complete transparency. An independent inquiry is the only way," an official at Buckingham Palace, the queen's official residence in

London, was quoted as saying.

The Daily Mail said the inquiry could be announced as early as Tuesday, the eve of the queen's ceremonial opening of a new session of the British parliament.

It added that both Queen Elizabeth and Prince Charles were likely to be interviewed as part of the investigation chaired by a member of the judiciary or high-ranking civil servant.

It would be the first time that an outsider has been called upon to investigate conduct of the royal family, the Times said.

Responding to the reports, a spokeswoman for the prince said: "We are considering a number of options."

Charles reportedly spent Monday locked in talks with senior aides and his companion Camilla

Parker Bowles over the crisis enveloping the House of Windsor since November 1 when the trial of Diana's former butler Paul Burrell collapsed.

Burrell had been accused of stealing hundreds of Diana's belongings after her August 1997 death in a Paris car crash. But the prosecution's case fell apart when Queen Elizabeth suddenly recalled that Burrell informed her of his intention to hold some items in safekeeping.

Since then Burrell has gone public with revelations about his years in royal service -- prompting others to do so, notably former valet George Smith who claimed he was raped in 1989 by a senior male aide to Prince Charles.

Smith, who accused Charles of covering up the affair, told the Mail on Sunday newspaper that in 1996

he told Diana about the alleged rape, and that she had tape-recorded his accusation.

Diana is said to have put the cassette, labelled "The Confessions of George Smith," in a locked wooden box -- the one police were searching for when they raided Burrell's house during their theft inquiry in January 2001.

On Tuesday, Burrell told the Daily Mirror that he had no idea where the tape was.

He said the last time he saw it was when he opened the box in the presence of Diana's sister Lady Sarah McCorquodale, following the princess' death in 1997.

The man accused of raping Smith -- who cannot be named in Britain for legal reasons -- has labelled the allegations as "wholly untrue."