



PHOTO: AFP

A relative of a bus crash victim cries after she found out about her daughter's death at the hospital in Situbondo, East Java yesterday. At least 54 people including 49 high school girls, were killed when a three vehicle pile-up burst into flames near the town of Yogyakarta, 450 Km east of Jakarta.

## Dozens killed in factional fighting in Afghanistan

AFP, Mazar-i-Sharif

Clashes between Afghanistan's northern warlords have left nearly 80 militiamen dead and wounded, the warring camps said Thursday, as fighting entered its second day just weeks ahead of an ambitious drive to disarm factions nominally loyal to the central government.

Battles between militias loyal to Tajik General Atta Mohammad and his rival Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostam broke out Wednesday 60km west of the main northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif.

As fighting moved east and threatened to enter the city, both sides moved tanks to their frontlines.

"From (Wednesday) night up to now we have more than 70 soldiers killed and injured," Mohammad's deputy General Abdul Sabor told AFP.

Dostam's deputy Sayed Nurullah said three of his fighters had been

killed and six wounded.

The fighters were using light and heavy weapons, Nurullah said.

Fighting Thursday was on the outskirts of Balkh, 20km west of Mazar-i-Sharif, the deputies said.

"Fighting is still continuing in Balkh district," Sabor said.

Tanks were deployed to guard Mazar-i-Sharif overnight, city police chief General Isa Iftikhar said, amid fears the fighting would move into the city.

US military spokesman Major Richard Sater said US-led coalition forces would take steps to help control the fighting "if required."

"The fighting is in an area where we have a provincial reconstruction team; yes, it affects us, it has impact on what we are doing."

"If required we will take steps to put the situation under control," he said, declining to elaborate.

Interior Minister Ali Ahmad Jalali arrived in Mazar-i-Sharif Thursday to try to defuse the tensions.

"There is a big problem in the north of the country. Around the city of Mazar the situation is quite tense now," he told reporters before departing Kabul.

On arrival Jalali visited Mazar-i-Sharif's British-run civil-military provisional reconstruction team helping with reconstruction and security.

Mohammad heads the mainly Tajik Jamiat faction and Dostam, a former communist general who is also a deputy defence minister, heads the mainly Uzbek Junbish group.

They have been vying for control of northern Afghanistan along with a third ethnic militia, the Hazaras' Hezb-i-Wahdat.

Dozens of people have been killed this year in factional clashes, one of the biggest headaches for President Hamid Karzai's administration in Kabul.

Two years after US-led forces began destroying the Taliban

regime, Afghanistan's provinces are choked with violence between rival factions and by resurgent Taliban fighters.

Attacks blamed on the Taliban, their allies from al-Qaeda and loyalists of renegade Islamist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar in the insurgency-wracked southeast have claimed 300 lives in the past two months.

The bloodshed has sent aid workers fleeing to the safety of larger cities, forcing the suspension of desperately-needed development projects in vast swathes of the countryside.

NATO, now leading the 5,300-strong foreign peacekeeping force in Kabul, agreed this week to deploy peacekeepers in provincial areas, answering the long-held pleas of Afghan leaders, United Nations officials and aid agencies.

## Sri Lanka names FM as candidate for UN top job

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's cabinet has formally nominated foreign minister Tyrone Fernando as a candidate to replace UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, a government spokesman said yesterday.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe nominated Fernando, an Oxford-educated barrister, to run for the top United Nations job, which is expected to be open by 2007, the spokesman said.

"Sri Lanka believes that it has a good chance of securing the position because geographically it appears to be a turn for a candidate from Asia," the spokesman said.

## President's guards in India arrested for 'rape'

BBC ONLINE

Four Indian presidential guards have been arrested in connection with the alleged rape of a young woman in the capital, Delhi.

The four men were produced in court on Wednesday, and have been sent to judicial custody.

They are believed to belong to an elite detachment of mounted cavalry guarding President Abdul Kalam.

The incident is alleged to have taken place in a park in the heart of Delhi's diplomatic enclave on Monday.

Senior police official Manoj Lal told the BBC the girl, a student of Delhi University, was in the park with a male companion when the guards allegedly assaulted both of them.

He said one of the guards robbed her friend, while two of them raped the girl in the park.

Police say a medical examination has established that she was sexually assaulted.

The incident is said to have taken place in the middle of the day.

The army has opened its own inquiry, the AFP news agency reports.

"Our unit has never been accused of such a crime before," it quoted an unnamed source from the presidential palace as saying.

"We will take all measures to establish if the accused are guilty."

## Indo-Pak talks

## Decide, respond: Jamali to Vajpayee

TIMES NEWS NETWORK, New Delhi

Pakistan Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali has said it was up to the Indian leadership to decide how they would respond to Islamabad's "positive overtures" to normalise bilateral relations.

"The ball is in India's court. Lets see what they have to say," Jamali told CNN recently in an interview.

Stating that Pakistan has done a lot to move towards dialogue with India, he said, "I have done my best. I talked and wrote to Vajpayee...we opened up missions, started road (link), offered air link between Bombay and Karachi, Delhi and Lahore."

"Why do the people of both the countries have to suffer because of lack of decision by the leadership, he wondered."

He said a number of incentives have been given in different sectors as "we have a positive approach".

Jamali reacting to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's speech at the United Nations General Assembly last month said, there was no mention of the carnage in Gujarat and no mention of the atrocities in Kashmir.

Claiming that India has currently deployed 700,000 troops in Kashmir, Jamali said, "The struggle there is totally indigenous".

"Pakistan has nothing to do with it. We give moral and diplomatic support...nothing beyond it," he said.

Jamali, who is currently in the US, said, he apprised US President George Bush and Secretary of State Collin Powell about his concerns about the Kashmir issue.

"We discussed, I made my point and it might lead to a better understanding and towards the solution of the (Kashmir) problem," Jamali, was quoted by the Associated Press of Pakistan as saying.

Referring to Pakistan's support to the war on terrorism, he said, "In Pakistan the struggle goes on to fight extremism and terrorism. We don't harbour any body, we do not give passage to anyone," he added.

Pakistan, he said, "from day one has been struggling not to support terrorism, Pakistan will not encourage terrorism, nor facilitate terrorism."

To a question about the testing of nuclear capable short range missile Jamali said, "Pakistan has a right to its defence, that's our priority and at times such tests do take place."

He said there was one test from Indian side, however Pakistan's test "is not fit for tat." "Pakistan has to maintain its minimum deterrence," he added.

## Gujarat riot cases

## Supreme Court intervenes

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court on Thursday intervened over the riot scarred state of Gujarat's handling of last year's communal violence following criticism of the lack of progress in prosecuting those responsible for around 2,000 deaths.

The Supreme Court said the western state would have to obtain federal clearances for special public prosecutors appointed by the state administration to try those charged with slaying Muslims.

The order was seen as a stern rebuke to the state's Hindu nationalist BJP government, accused by rights groups of turning a blind eye to the sectarian violence which killed mostly Muslims.

The court also appointed India's former solicitor general Harish Salve as "amicus curiae" (friend of the court) in Gujarat. Analysts said the friend of the court's role would be as an observer to guarantee impartiality.

They said the appointment showed the Supreme Court's lack of faith in the provincial judiciary after 21 Hindus were acquitted in July for the torching of a Muslim-owned bakery during the riots that left 12 people

dead.

The ruling came during the hearing of a joint petition filed by India's autonomous National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and 17-year-old Zaheera Sheikh to reopen the trial of 21 Hindus acquitted in the Best Bakery case.

Sheikh, whose father died in the massacre, says she and many other witnesses retracted their incriminating testimony at trial because they were threatened by local right-wing Hindu leaders. She has since fled Gujarat.

Last month the Supreme Court's Chief Justice V.N. Khare said he had no faith in the prosecution in the riot cases or in the Gujarat government.

India's Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani, who also belongs to the BJP, called the riots "disturbing" but argued that the provincial administration had no hand in the religious blood-letting.

"What happened in Gujarat could disturb anyone. And then when one finds that the offenders are not brought to book that certainly creates a strong reaction," Advani told a TV talk show on the state-run Doordarshan network, scheduled to be broadcast on Friday.

"But at the same time I am

not able to attribute it only to one case... I have seen cases as bad and which collapsed totally simply because the system is such," he said in the interview, a copy of which was released in advance Thursday.

"I certainly do not accept that it is a deliberate subversion of justice by the (Gujarat) state government," Advani said.

Meanwhile, 13 of the 21 acquitted Hindus were rearrested Thursday but were released on bail, police said.

"We have arrested 13 of the 21 accused in the Best Bakery case and produced them before the court," Baroda city Police Commissioner Sudhir Sinha told AFP.

He said the police had warrants issued against all 21 accused Tuesday, but seven were still to be served, he said.

He said the warrants were issued to ensure their attendance at an appeal of their acquittals by the Gujarat government in the state high court.

The riots in Gujarat erupted in February 2002 after a mob, believed to be Muslims, torched a train carrying Hindus, killing 59.

## Sri Lanka Muslim town under curfew after clashes

AFP, Colombo

Police clamped a dusk-to-dawn curfew on a Muslim town in north-eastern Sri Lanka yesterday to prevent an escalation of clashes between minority Muslims and Tamils, officials said.

The troubles erupted overnight in the town of Kinniya when Tamil and Muslim villagers clashed over a land dispute, police officials in the area said by telephone.

Army units had been asked to help police maintain law and

order in the highly volatile area, where there has been communal violence in the past.

A top Muslim leader, Rauf Hakeem, who is also the ports minister, was flown to the area yesterday to defuse tension, a spokesman for Hakeem said.

Police said the curfew was a precaution to prevent fighting between the island's two main minority groups, the Tamils and the Muslims.

## Pakistan blamed for failure of South Asia trade pact

IANS, Bangkok

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee blamed Pakistan in an interview published on Thursday for the failure of a free trade pact in South Asia while asserting that a similar agreement with Thailand is bound to succeed.

"The India-Thailand FTA (Free Trade Agreement) looks like it will work, while the South Asia FTA and the South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement have not seen real progress solely because of the unreasonable obstructions of one South Asian country," Vajpayee told

The Nation newspaper, in a clear reference to Pakistan.

Vajpayee, the first Indian prime minister to visit Thailand in a decade, said the India-Thailand trade agreement, which would be one of the highlights of his four-day trip ending on Sunday, would be the first such pact outside the South Asian region.

In a wide ranging interview conducted in New Delhi before his departure for Indonesia, Vajpayee was asked questions on such issues as India-China competition in Southeast Asia, New Delhi's deepening engagement with ASEAN and

the liberalisation of the Indian economy.

Vajpayee said the rapid intensification of India's trade and investment relations with Southeast Asia was an integral part of New Delhi's foreign policy.

Vajpayee, who arrived in Bangkok from Bali after attending the ninth summit of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), said India-ASEAN trade could double to \$30 billion in the next few years, with agriculture, pharmaceuticals, IT and manufactured products playing a key role.

He said India and Thailand had identified several fields, including information and communications technology, finance and banking, tourism, infrastructure, healthcare, construction, education, fisheries and aquaculture to promote the free trade pact.

"I am sure the FTA will provide a new stimulus to our trade and economic cooperation," he said.

The Prime Minister denied the newspaper's suggestion that Indian bureaucracy and business people were inward looking.

"I think today's technology revolution and globalisation do not permit any country, or any group of people, the luxury of being inward looking. We have to match with the times, and India's economic indicators show that we are doing so with outstanding success."

"It is, of course, true that India has a market of continental proportions and Indian business obviously seeks to retain its dominance therein. But our liberalisation policies have ensured that foreign business can also access these markets with the right marketing strategy."

"At the same time, a number of Indian companies are going multinational, manufacturing in foreign countries and operating in global markets."



PHOTO: AFP

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (R) shakes hand with his Indian counter-part Atal Bihari Vajpayee prior to their meeting at the Government House in Bangkok yesterday. Vajpayee arrived on a four-day official visit for talks on bilateral and regional issues before signing agreements on mutual interests of the two countries.

## Pak national indicted on terror charges

PTI, New York

A Pakistani national Uzair Pracha has been formally indicted by US federal prosecutors on charges of terrorism, providing material support to Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda network and using false documents to facilitate acts of terror.

Pracha, who has legal permanent resident in the US, was charged in a five-count indictment, six months after he was arrested in New York City, with seeking to assist an al-Qaeda associate for entering the country. The indictment on Wednesday expands the charges against him.

His lawyer said Pracha would plead not guilty.

US Attorney-General John Ashcroft said that the indictment makes it clear that Justice Department will investigate and prosecute with same energy and determination those who provide

support to terrorists.

If convicted, he faces a maximum of ten years in prison on two counts and 15 years on two counts and 25 years on one count.

Pasracha was detained in late March at the office of the import company where he worked as a material witness in the investigation into al-Qaeda and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

Prosecutors said he agreed to help the terrorist operative, who was not named, to apply to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for a refugee travel document and to retrieve his passport -- documents that would have allowed him to reenter and possibly remain in the United States.

As part of the scheme, Pasracha agreed to pose as the individual in phone calls to the INS, according to the indictment.