

Mourners run riot after Pak mosque blast

Death toll rises to 19, Musharraf pledges action to stem wave of bloodletting

AP, Karachi

President Gen. Pervez Musharraf pledged action to stem the wave of bloodletting. The bombing ripped through Imam Bargah Ali Raza mosque during evening prayers on Monday, also injuring at least 42 people, police said.

Angry Shias ransacked several shops and hurled stones near the mosque hit in Monday's bombing, as a huge funeral procession descended into violence along a major highway in the southern city of Karachi. Hundreds of police left tear gas at the crowd.

No one claimed responsibility for the bombing. But Karachi has been wracked by violence between the Sunni Muslim majority and Shia minority, and the attack was seen as revenge for the assassination Sunday of a senior Sunni Muslim cleric, Nazamuddin Shamzai, that also triggered street

battles between youths and police.

"Apparently, it was a suicide attack," Manzoor Mughal, a senior police investigator, told The Associated Press following night-long operations to recover bodies and sift through the rubble. "We did not see any crater in the mosque, which shows that it was a suicide attack."

Karachi police chief Asad Ashraf Malik said a body retrieved from the scene was being examined to determine whether it was that of a suicide bomber.

The death toll rose to 19 Tuesday when three of the injured died of their wounds.

Musharraf expressed grief over the killings and promised to take an "important step" in response, Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed quoted him as saying.

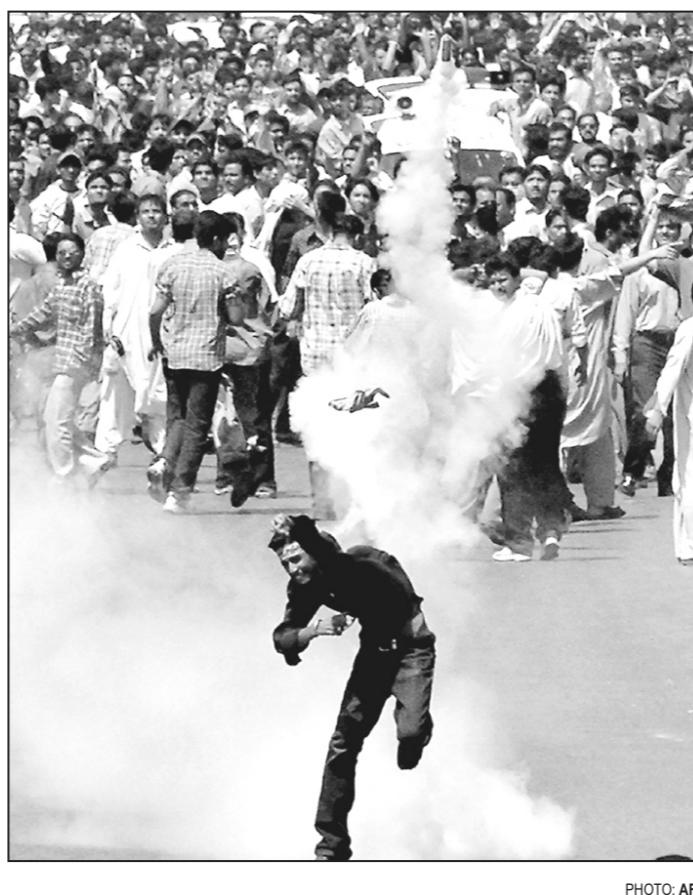


PHOTO: AFP

A Pakistani Shia Muslim youth hurls back a tear gas shell fired by police as others flee during clashes between police and Shia mourners in Karachi yesterday.

Indo-US strategic talks start to improve ties

ANI, New Delhi

India and the US yesterday began a three-day strategic dialogue, the first such interaction between the two countries after the new government assumed office here.

The holding of the meeting of what is known as the India-US Defence Policy Group (DPG) marks continuation of an exercise initiated during the previous administration.

The new government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has said it would seek to "strengthen, widen and deepen" relations with the US.

An Indian defence ministry spokesman said the DPG would discuss the entire gamut of bilateral defence ties, including strategic issues, joint exercises, training and acquisition.

"The talks will also review counter-terrorism requirements of India, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, security of sea-lanes in the Indian Ocean and peace and stability in

Asia," he added.

The Indian delegation to the DPG meeting, being held at the defence ministry, is led by Defence Secretary Ajay Prasad while his counterpart US Under Secretary of Defence Douglas Feith, is heading the American team.

Defence ministry sources indicated that the acquisition of defence hardware, including P3-C Orion long-range reconnaissance aircraft for the Indian Navy, was expected to figure in the talks.

India had last year expressed an interest in acquiring these aircraft to replace its ageing fleet of Russian-made maritime patrol aircraft and preliminary talks had been held by both sides on the issue.

"The talks are still ongoing and the situation is fluid. But the acquisition of the Orions is expected to figure in the talks," said a defence source.

Upcoming exercises, including one in which India's armed forces will travel to Alaska to train with American special forces and other

multilateral exercises to be held in Singapore later this year, will also be discussed, the sources said.

Under the previous Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition government, India had rapidly expanded its defence ties with the US. The armies and air forces of both sides held several exercises over the past two years.

The previous DPG meetings had been held in December 2001 and in May 2002. The next meeting took place after a long gap in August 2003 in Washington.

The rapid expansion of military-to-military contacts between the two sides has focussed on training, joint exercises, participation in US-sponsored multilateral events, disaster management, humanitarian activities and search and rescue oriented planning.

The two sides signed an agreement on security measures for the protection of classified military information in January 2002 and a master information exchange agreement to facilitate defence research and development in February 2004.

Advani to lead BJP in Lok Sabha

PTI, New Delhi

For someone long regarded within BJP as a future Prime Minister, the wheel has turned a full circle for Lal Krishna Advani when he was yesterday elected Leader of the BJP Parliamentary Party that will make him Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, a post he held 13 years ago.

Widely regarded within the Sangh Parivar as a potential successor to Vajpayee in the Prime Minister's chair, the shock results of the recent elections meant that the 77-year-old journalist-turned-politician will lead the opposition in the Lok Sabha against the first ever Congress-headed coalition government.

Advani, a forceful speaker with cold logic, was always a perfect foil to the poetic and persuasive Vajpayee. But his advocacy of the Hindutva issue, symbolised by his famous Yatra politics catapulted him into the centrestage of Indian politics.

He took over as BJP President from Vajpayee in 1986 in the aftermath of the 1984 poll debacle when the party faced its "worst setback" of winning only two seats.

Advani is largely credited with its rise to 88 seats in 1989, 121 seats in 1991, 181 seats in 1996 and finally the saffron party's emergence as the ruling party in 1998.

Born on November 8, 1929 in Karachi, Advani did his schooling at St Patricks. He later graduated in Law from Bombay University.

An active member of the RSS in Karachi, he served the RSS in Rajasthan after partition. He later joined the Jan Sangh and went on to become the Secretary of their Parliamentary Group.

In 1967, he was elected Chairman of the Delhi Metropolitan Council and in 1970, he was elected to the Rajya Sabha as a Member of Parliament. He held the position of Information and Broadcasting Minister in the Janata Party Government in 1980 and was BJP's All India President from 1986 to 1991.

Having been a member of the Rajya Sabha for nearly two decades, he was for the first time elected to the Lok Sabha from the New Delhi constituency in 1989. He was again re-elected from the Gandhinagar and New Delhi constituencies but retained the former seat.

The final death toll may be about 50, but the bodies were in such a bad state that identification was difficult, they said. About 20 inmates were injured, the report added.

The prisoners, who killed one guard on Sunday night, laid down their weapons on Monday night.

The authorities made no immediate comment, but Rio state security secretary Antony Garotinho was to hold a press conference on Tuesday.

Brazil prison mutiny ends: 35 killed

AFP, Rio De Janeiro

Brazilian security forces found the bodies of at least 34 inmates and a prison guard after a mutiny was ended in a Rio de Janeiro prison, TV Globo News said yesterday.

Emergency services, quoted by the network, said most of the bodies taken out of the Benfica prison were burned or mutilated. About 15 had been decapitated.

The final death toll may be about 50, but the bodies were in such a bad state that identification was difficult, they said. About 20 inmates were injured, the report added.

The prisoners, who killed one guard on Sunday night, laid down their weapons on Monday night.

The authorities made no immediate comment, but Rio state security secretary Antony Garotinho was to hold a press conference on Tuesday.

US set to push for Asian maritime security

REUTERS, Singapore

Indonesian island of Sumatra and the Malaysian peninsula to Singapore each year.

"I think Rumsfeld will want to do some damage control on this issue to try and get it viewed in a more positive light by regional countries, particularly Indonesia and Malaysia," said Michael Richardson, a researcher at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

The United States has not held any formal talks with Asian nations on its plan for a Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI), but knows it must smooth the diplomatic waters if to be successful.

"The ball is in the US court to pacify Indonesia and Malaysia and get the issue back on the table," said a Western diplomat in Singapore.

Singapore's deputy prime minister and Coordinating Minister for Security and Defence, Tony Tan, has repeatedly warned there is mounting evidence that terror networks such as the Jemaah Islamiah are preparing for a seaborne attack.

"The threat of a commercial vessel or cruise liner being hijacked and used a floating bomb against Singapore is a very serious one," he told reporters during a recent inspection of security preparations around the city state's ports.

Singapore, one of Washington's closest Asian allies and commander of a large security force in Strait, wants nations that benefit from trade carried along the waterways of the region, such as the United States and Japan, to contribute to policing.

Iranian MPs warn of NPT pullout if IAEA keeps up pressure

AFP, Tehran

Iran's new conservative-controlled parliament will consider pulling the Islamic republic out of a key nuclear arms control treaty if the UN's atomic energy watchdog is deemed to be too pro-American, two deputies warned yesterday.

"If the IAEA again acts in the way that the Americans want and if the big powers use the Non-Proliferation Treaty to pressure Iran, parliament will examine leaving the NPT," MPs Ali Abaspour and Hossein Nejatabadi told the hardline Jomhuri Islami newspaper.

The warning comes ahead of a June 14 meeting of the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), where the body's executive -- the Board of Governors -- are due to review the progress of inspections of Iran's suspect bid to

generate nuclear power.

Abaspour said the outcome of the meeting would "serve as a basis" for a decision in parliament on how Iran should handle its future relations with the IAEA, including whether it ratifies an additional protocol to the NPT that allows tougher inspections.

"If the IAEA acts in an independent manner, parliament will insist on continued cooperation," said the MP, one of a majority of conservative deputies who seized control of the Majlis after most reformist candidates were barred from standing in February's parliamentary polls.

"But if we see that the IAEA is simply a tool of the United States and is only looking for pretexts to use against Iran, we will put on parliament's agenda a move to leave these treaties," he warned.

KERRY SAYS Nuclear terrorism is gravest threat to US

REUTERS, Washington

Nuclear terrorism is the gravest threat the United States faces, Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry said yesterday as he offered a plan to secure atomic arsenals and materials around the world.

"The enemy is different and we must think and act anew," Kerry said in excerpts of remarks prepared for delivery in West Palm Beach, Florida. "We have to do everything we can to stop a nuclear weapon from ever reaching our shore and that mission begins far away."

In the second of three speeches on national security, Kerry is expected to propose a new high-level White House job oversee efforts to prevent a terrorist attack using nuclear weapons and recommend speeding up a current program to secure nuclear material in the former Soviet Union.

Justice Lahoti takes oath as Chief Justice of India

PTI, New Delhi

Justice Ramesh Chandra Lahoti yesterday became the new Chief Justice of India taking oath in the name of God and immediately thereafter took blessings of his mother at the glittering Ashoka Hall of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Justice Lahoti, who succeeds Justice S Rajendra Babu and has a tenure of nearly 18 months as CJ, was administered oath of office by President APJ Abdul Kalam in the presence of Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi.

On the completion of the brief oath taking ceremony, the 63-year-old CJ rushed to his mother and touched her feet seeking blessings before a 200-odd dignitaries that included cabinet Ministers, Judges of the Supreme Court and the High Court.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian boys, standing under a huge national flag, celebrate yesterday the International Children's Day at a youth activities center in the West Bank's Kalandia refugee camp. The conflict pitting Palestinians against Israelis for the past four years has had a severe impact on children, both physically and psychologically, the head of the UN children rights organisation said Monday.

Nepal still in chaos 3-yr after royal massacre

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's king struggled yesterday to find a new prime minister who can end the country's political turmoil in a reminder that the dust has yet to settle three years after 10 members of the royal family were massacred.

There was no public ceremony to mark the anniversary of the death of King Birendra, who was gunned down with nine other royals at Narayanhiti Palace on June 1, 2001 by drunken crown prince Dipendra, who turned the gun on himself, apparently after a row with his parents over his choice of fiancee.

But ordinary Nepalese, many of whom regard the country's monarch as an incarnation of a Hindu god, laid flowers and offered prayers at makeshift memorials across the capital, Kathmandu.

Meanwhile, feuding opposition parties missed a Monday deadline set by King Gyanendra -- who sacked the elected government in 2002 -- to pick a premier capable of quelling a long-running Maoist