

Militants ambush MP's motorcade in Kashmir 17 killed in violence

Seventeen people were killed yesterday in bloody separatist violence in Indian Kashmir, including a rebel ambush on an Indian MP's motorcade, police said. Six policemen, including an officer, were killed when a motorcade of a Kashmiri member of the Indian parliament, Lal Singh, hit a landmine and then was fired on in southern Doda district, a police spokesman said. Five policemen and civilians were injured in the attack by the rebels, who hid behind pine trees and boulders, the spokesman said, adding that the condition of two policemen was critical. Police said four policemen died on the spot, while two of those injured died in hospital. Singh, a member of India's ruling Congress party, was not injured. Local lawmaker G.M. Saroori, who accompanied him on the way to a public meeting, also escaped unharmed. Police said troops were rushed to the area to find the rebels involved in the attack in Doda, one of the districts most hit by the insurgency. Troops also gunned down three rebels minutes after they crossed the Line of Control (LoC), the de facto border with Pakistan in the northern Kupwara district, police said. India accuses Pakistan of arming the rebels and demands a halt to alleged infiltration. Pakistan denies the charges. India's defence minister Pranab Mukherjee on his maiden visit to Kashmir this week said the Indian troops had nearly completed the fencing of the LoC and that it would help reduce infiltration. The two countries held talks last week in New Delhi that included rare discussion of their Kashmir dispute as part of a go-slow peace process.



Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri (L) and Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh (R) hold hands during their bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) at the Jakarta Convention Center in the Indonesian capital yesterday. Pakistan became the 24th member of the ARF, which groups all the world's major powers and which was holding its 11th annual meeting in closed session.

Pakistan joins ARF Indo-Pak FMs meet in Jakarta to build trust

productive in terms of bringing about a solution to the dispute if we start talking about it (in the media)," Kasuri said. "Pakistan and India should try to resolve issues peacefully because too much is at stake, both are nuclear powers, both have the means to deliver nuclear weapons. "It is eminently sensible for them to do so (resolve issues). One-third of the world's poor after all do live in South Asia and it's largely because of continuing and persisting tension between Pakistan and India," he stressed. India and Pakistan have fought three wars over Kashmir, a region in the northern Himalayas divided between the two states and claimed by both. Pakistani and Indian diplomats met in New Delhi last week for talks aimed at coming up with solutions for a final settlement of the dispute. "I don't want to go into specific solutions. It's not really going to be

Typhoon toll rises to 23 in Philippines

REUTERS, Manila The death toll from the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year rose to 23 yesterday, as rescue workers rushed to clear landslides and send food and medicine to isolated areas, disaster officials said. Thousands of people were displaced by typhoon Mindulle, which packed winds of 118 miles per hour and gusts of up to 140 miles per hour as it swept past the northern region of the main Luzon island. Crop and infrastructure damage was estimated at \$9.8 million, mostly in rice- and corn-growing areas in Cagayan Valley region, the National Disaster Coordinating Council said. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo boarded a navy rubber boat on Friday to distribute relief goods to nearly 200,000 residents in Cagayan province, which bore the brunt of the storm. "I want immediate measures to restore agricultural capacity," said Arroyo, in a statement she read before inspecting villages affected by typhoon in Cagayan province.

Pakistan dismantling terror network in its own interest: Musharraf

Pakistan is trying to dismantle the country's terrorist network for the sake of its own "national interest", President Pervez Musharraf told two visiting US senators yesterday, officials said. During a meeting with Republican senators Don Nickles and Jeff Sessions General Musharraf reiterated Pakistan had to eliminate outsiders who were misusing its territory, a foreign ministry statement said. "It was very much in Pakistan's national interest to dismantle the terror network and get rid of outsiders trying to misuse our territory," Musharraf told the US lawmakers, according to a foreign ministry statement. Pakistan, a key ally in Washington's fight against terrorism, has been engaged in a campaign to neutralise al-Qaeda foreign militants hiding in its tribal territory bordering Afghanistan.

Maoist rebels kill mayor of Nepal's top tourist town

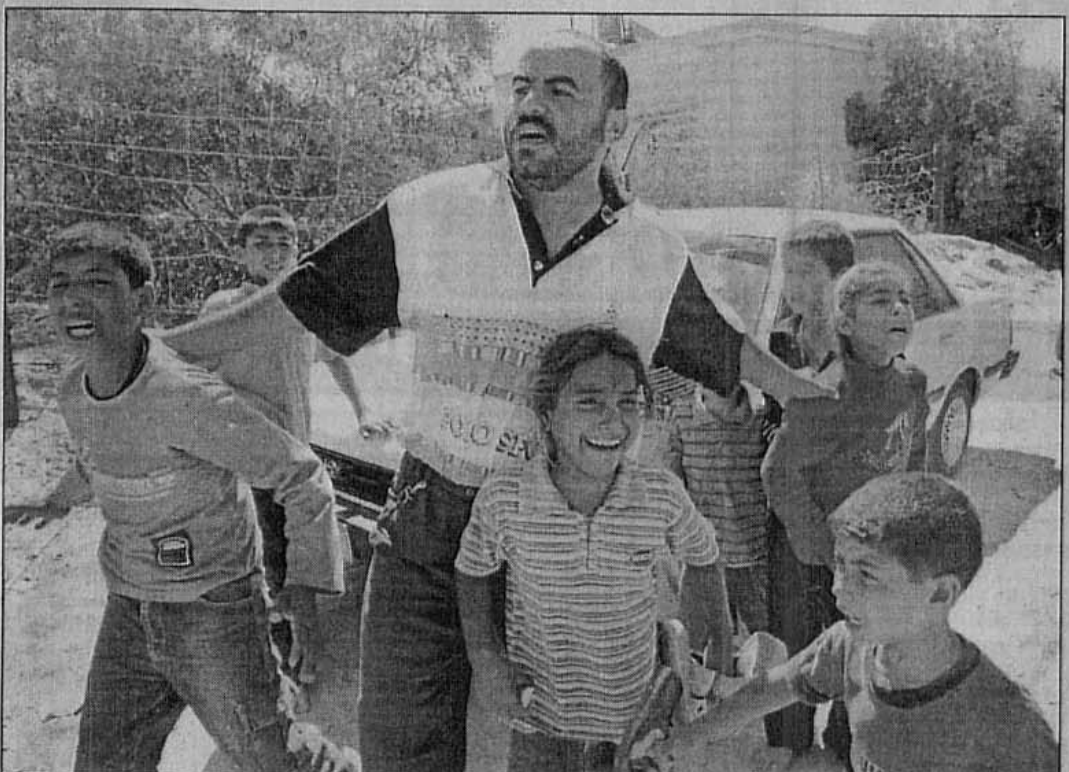
Suspected Maoist rebels Friday assassinated the mayor of Nepal's leading tourist town, Pokhara, in a hit-and-run shooting in a busy marketplace, an official said. The killing of Pokhara Mayor Harkha Bahadur Gurung is one of the highest-profile assassinations since the Maoists launched their "people's war" in 1996 aimed at overthrowing the monarchy. Three gunmen opened fire at the mayor, his driver and his bodyguard as they went on an early-morning drive through a crowded market area in Pokhara, a western town and gateway for trekkers in the Annapurna range. "The mayor succumbed to his bullet injuries while underground treatment at the hospital," home ministry spokesman Gopendra Bahadur Pandey told AFP. "The condition of Gurung's bodyguard Karim Bahadur Gurung and his driver Prasad Gurung are reported to be serious," Pandey said. He said three Maoists carried out the attack and fled after the shooting.

ARF backs bid to solve nuke crisis US, N Korean officials hold talks

A major Asia-Pacific security forum gave strong support yesterday to new efforts to end the North Korean nuclear crisis, as the US and North Korean foreign ministers held rare high-level talks on the sidelines of the meeting. Members of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF), in a statement after their annual meeting, "emphasised the importance of a step-by-step process of 'words for words' and 'action for action'." US Secretary of State Colin Powell has promised to match North Korea "deed for deed" if it agrees to dismantle its nuclear weapons and halt their development under a US plan laid out last week. Powell and his North Korean counterpart, Paek Nam-Sun, met privately early Friday and both sides indicated some progress was made. It was the first face-to-face cabinet-level contact since 2002 between the United States and the secretive communist state, which Washington has branded as part of an "axis of evil." The ARF foreign ministers also condemned terrorism as a world-wide threat, agreed to work together to improve transport security and urged army-ruled Myanmar to move towards democracy. Powell spoke of an "opportunity for concrete progress" after his 20-minute meeting with Paek. The North Koreans said that if the United States intends to improve relations, "the DPRK (North Korea) also will not regard the US as a permanent enemy..." Paek in a statement said the North is still committed to denuclearising the Korean peninsula peacefully. ARF whose membership rose to 24 after Pakistan joined yesterday, includes "six-party" talks on resolving the nuclear crisis -- the United States, China, Japan, Russia and North and South Korea.



A boy sits on the ruins of his collapsed house in the eastern Turkish village of Viginally yesterday after an earthquake, measuring 5.1 on the open-ended Richter scale, hit the eastern town of Agri earlier in the day, killing a total of 18 people and injuring 21 others.



The young relatives of killed Palestinian Yusef al-Arja, 25, are comforted by an adult outside the hospital in the Rafah refugee camp in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. Arja was shot by fire from an Israeli tank. There were no clashes in the area when the tank opened fire. In all two Palestinian men were killed by Israeli fire Friday morning in two separate incidents in the southern Gaza Strip.

Israeli troops to stay in Gaza until end of 2005 Four Palestinians killed

Soldiers will remain in the northern Gaza Strip, a launchpad for Palestinian rockets, until Israel completes its planned Gaza withdrawal next year, the defense minister said yesterday, as violence flared in with the deaths of four Palestinians. "The army will continue to control the area where it deployed (Monday) until the last minute before the withdrawal," Shaul Mofaz told the Yediot Aharonot daily on a visit to Beit Hanun on Thursday. Troops raided and occupied the area after Palestinian militants fired two rockets into the nearby southern Israeli town of Sderot, killing two civilians, last Monday. The headline Islamic Hamas group claimed the attack. It was the first time their trademark, homemade Qassam rockets had caused any Israeli casualties. Mofaz's office confirmed his statements to AFP on Friday. The Israeli government backed in early June a proposal by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to pull out troops from Gaza and dismantle all Jewish settlements in the territory, and another four in the northern West Bank by end-2005. Meanwhile, in the Gaza Strip, three Palestinian men were killed by Israeli fire in three separate incidents, while a 15-year-old Palestinian youth died of wounds he had sustained Thursday, medics said. Mohammed Ahmed Krayyem, 55, was killed near the Jewish settlement bloc of Gush Katif and 25-year-old Yussef al-Arja was shot in Rafah, both in the southern Gaza Strip. Israeli military sources confirmed they opened fire and "hit" a Palestinian man who was walking toward an army post in the Gush Katif bloc. Khan Yunis residents told AFP that Krayyem had been mentally disabled. Arja was shot by fire from an Israeli tank, Palestinian security sources and witnesses said, but there was no immediate confirmation from the Israeli army. In Beit Hanun, Mohammed Deifallah, 21, was killed inside his house and Hamzi Abush died of wounds inflicted when he and other Palestinians were protesting against an Israeli operation, medics said. Troops have closed some four kilometers (three miles) of the Salaheddine road that links Beit Hanun to Erez -- the only Palestinian crossing point into Israel except Rafah at the southern most tip of the Gaza Strip. The deaths brought the overall toll since the September 2000 outbreak of the Palestinian intifada, or uprising, to 4,144, including 3,149 Palestinians and 923 Israelis, according to an AFP count.

US bars 6 ships as anti-terror law takes hold

REUTERS, Washington/London The United States denied entry to six foreign-flagged ships on Thursday as tough new global laws to protect shipping from terrorist attacks took effect with little overall disruption to global trade. Washington, fearing an attack or infiltration by al-Qaeda from the sea, has vowed to police the new United Nations codes strictly by turning away ships that are not security-certified or delaying ones that have called at "contaminated ports." Adm. Thomas Collins, commander of the US Coast Guard, told Reuters the agency had denied entry to six out of 265 ships arriving in the United States on Thursday for failing to have valid new security certificates. He did not say what flags the six ships carried. He said none of them were oil tankers, but rather tended to be "freight-type vessels." Collins gave no further details on the ships, but said the tightened security regime had not had a significant impact on the flow of trade. A US Coast Guard official said earlier the agency had ordered Bolivian-flagged cargo ship Dahomey Express to leave US waters because it lacked the new security certificates. There was no immediate information on the other five vessels. The codes, signed by 147 governments, require ports, stevedoring companies and owners of ships larger than 500 tons to draw up plans for responding to a terror threat, implement tighter security around facilities and train staff. The global shipping community is watching US enforcement efforts to check the effectiveness of the codes. On the eve of the July 1 deadline to implement the new anti-terrorism measures, only about half of the world's ports and 53 percent of global shipping had complied with the International Ship and Port Facility Security Code, according to the UN's International Maritime Organisation, its chief architect.

al-Qaeda vows to carry out attacks in Europe

FBI urges increased patrols for July 4th REUTERS, AP, Dubai/Washington A purported statement from an al-Qaeda-linked group vowed to carry out attacks in Europe after the expiry of a three-month truce offered by Osama bin Laden in April, London-based Asharq al-Awsat newspaper said yesterday. al-Qaeda leader bin Laden, in an audio tape on April 15, extended a truce to Europeans if they withdrew troops from Muslim nations and said that the offer would last three months. "To the European people ... you only have a few more days to accept bin Laden's truce or you will only have yourselves to blame," said the statement purported to be from Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades, which claimed responsibility for the March 11 bombings in Spain. It was not immediately possible to verify the authenticity of the statement, parts of which were published by Asharq al-Awsat. The daily said the letter was dated July 1. "Muslims in the West should depart to Muslim states if they can," the letter said. "Those who cannot should take precautions and live in Muslim areas, have enough food to last a month, find ways to protect themselves and their families, leave enough money in the house to last one month or longer and to pray a lot and put their fate in God's hands," it added. Several European states had rejected the truce offer, which excluded the United States and Israel. The CIA has said the voice on the tape was "likely" that of Saudi-born bin Laden, whose group carried out the September 2001 attacks on US cities. AP adds: A constant stream of intelligence indicating that al-Qaeda wants to strike the United States this summer or fall has led federal officials to urge increased vigilance during the Independence Day weekend, but there is no specific threat of an attack timed to the holiday. In a bulletin sent to law enforcement agencies nationwide Thursday, the FBI said police should step up patrols and watch for signs of terrorist activity, including surveillance of potential targets. The FBI also listed advice on how to spot possible suicide bombers. "We know the US homeland remains a top al-Qaeda target," the FBI said in the bulletin, sent weekly to 18,000 state and local law enforcement agencies.

World press focuses on Saddam trial

enormous potential that has not been realised," said The Times. But the left-leaning Guardian described Thursday's opening-day proceedings as "staged" and warned that a proper trial by the Iraqi people "can only happen when they have an elected government and not a US-appointed regime." France's Liberation said "the way in which (Saddam) is treated will be a test of the type of regime that Iraq will have." Newspapers in Moscow also cast doubt on the Baghdad court's independence in the trial for war crimes of Saddam and 11 members of his former regime, who appeared for the first time on Thursday. "Contrary to the tribunals in Nuremberg and The Hague, the tribunals for Rwanda and Sierra Leone, this court is not international or independent," said the centrist Isvestia. There were inevitable comparisons to the trial in UN court in The Hague of former Yugoslav strongman Slobodan Milosevic.



A US soldier takes a picture of a rocket launcher placed in the truck of a burnt van following an attack against the Sheraton Hotel in Baghdad yesterday. The rockets were fired from the van which was parked alongside Fardus square outside the heavy concrete barriers that seal off the Sheraton and its sister hotel the Palestine, home to many journalists and businessmen. The rockets lit ablaze the mini-van when they were fired off. There were no initial reports of casualties.