

New violence in Ivory Coast kills seven

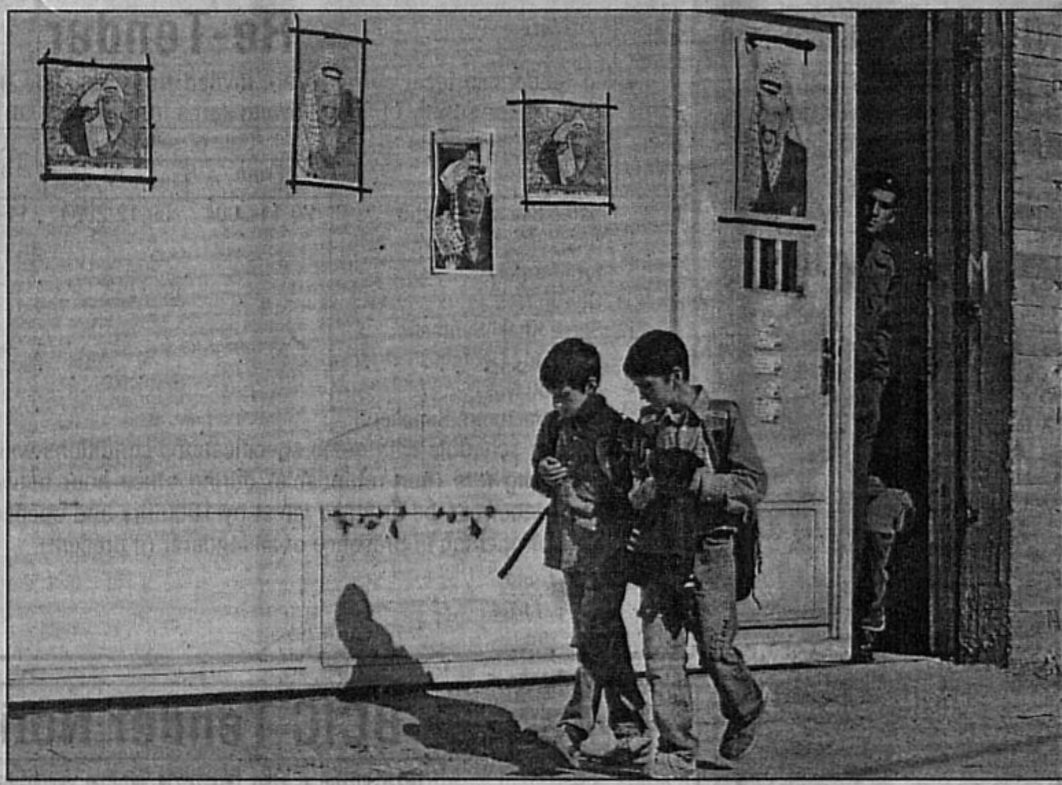
AFP, Abidjan

Supporters of President Laurent Gbagbo clashed with French troops in a standoff that killed at least seven people, boosting tensions in Ivory Coast despite an upbeat assessment of peace prospects by South African President Thabo Mbeki.

The violence outside Abidjan's luxury Hotel Ivoire, less than one kilometer (half a mile) from the presidential residence where the heads of state met, took the reported death toll from the week of unrest to 132 people across the divided west African state.

Mbeki left Abidjan after his day-long mission on behalf of the African Union saying he was "pleased" by Gbagbo's commitment to restoring peace.

The South African president has been a key mediator in the two years of turmoil in Ivory Coast, which flared again Thursday with air strikes Gbagbo said he had ordered to "liberate and reunify the country" but which the international community has condemned as a violation of an 18-month-old ceasefire.



A Palestinian policeman watches two young boys as they walk past portraits of alling leader Yasser Arafat, outside the Muqataa, Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday. The death of Arafat, who has been lying in a coma in a French hospital for a week, was expected to be announced at his West Bank headquarters following a meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) executive committee.

Palestinian factions call for calm

Leaders discuss crisis in joint PLO-Fatah talks

AFP, Gaza City

The 13 main Palestinian factions on Wednesday urged the population not to open fire or riot following any official announcement that veteran leader Yasser Arafat has died, an Islamic Jihad leader said.

The factions unanimously decided to "call on the Palestinian people not to fire into the air or set fire to tyres in the streets," said Khaled al-Batsh.

Warning Palestinians against obstructing streets, they urged the people to refrain from attacking public property and shops, and to behave responsibly, he added.

The decisions were taken late Tuesday at a meeting on the necessary arrangements should Arafat, who has spent the last week in a coma in a French military hospital, be declared dead.

The groups, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for

the Liberation of Palestine and Arafat's Fatah party, also decided that condolence ceremonies would be held in the leader's Gaza City headquarters.

On Saturday, prime minister Ahmed Qorei urged Palestinians not to allow themselves to be dragged into internecine warfare should Arafat die.

Palestinian leaders began a joint meeting of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Fatah central committee here Wednesday as Yasser Arafat lay fighting for his life in France.

Sources inside the Muqataa, Palestinian leader Arafat's leadership compound, confirmed that the meeting had begun with former prime minister Mahmud Abbas in the chair.

Current premier Ahmed Qorei and foreign minister Nabil Shaath were also attending the meeting, the sources added.

Abbas, Qorei, Shaath and parliament speaker Rawhi Fattuh all returned to the West Bank in the early hours after visiting Arafat at his hospital bedside in a military hospital on the southwestern outskirts of Paris.

After the joint Fatah-PLO meeting, the most senior members would also be joined by leaders of other Palestinian factions such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine at around 1:00 pm (1100 GMT).

Apart from being briefed on Arafat's condition, committee members were also expected to decide on an offer by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to host a funeral in Cairo in the event of Arafat's death.

The Palestinian representative in Paris, Leila Shahid, said Wednesday that Arafat was still alive but in a deep coma and his fate was "in the hands of God".

Blast wounds Dutch police in raid

BBC NEWS ONLINE

Three Dutch police officers have been wounded in an explosion during an anti-terror raid on a house in The Hague. Police said two of them were seriously injured by the grenade blast. Shots were also fired during the raid.

The area - near the Holland Spoor train station - was sealed off and airspace immediately over it was closed.

Meanwhile a Muslim school in Uden has been burned down - part of a spate of attacks following the murder of film-maker Theo van Gogh, a critic of Islam. Attacks have targeted Christian and Muslim buildings across the Netherlands.

Police said there were still suspects in the building raided in The Hague on Wednesday.

Van Gogh, murdered in Amsterdam a week ago, had received death threats after the release of his latest film controversially portraying domestic violence in Muslim societies. It showed images of a semi-naked woman with Koranic script daubed on her body.

Ashcroft, Evans resign from Bush cabinet

REUTERS, Washington

US Attorney General John Ashcroft, a lightning rod of criticism by civil liberties groups for his anti-terror policies after the Sept. 11 attacks and who once even ordered the robing of two partially nude statues in his department, resigned on Tuesday.

A leading candidate to replace Ashcroft is former Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson, who once ran the department under Ashcroft and faithfully implemented his policies.

Others likely candidates were White House counsel Alberto Gonzales, President Bush's election campaign chairman Marc Racicot and former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani.

Ashcroft, a devout Christian who once ordered two partially nude

statues covered up at the Justice Department so he would no longer be photographed in front of them, began what is expected to be a gradual Cabinet reshuffle ahead of Bush's second term on Jan. 20.

Ashcroft, who missed nearly a month of work earlier this year because of pancreatitis and surgery to remove his gallbladder, had long been a target of criticism by civil liberties groups and some Democrats in Congress over the Bush administration's anti-terrorism policies adopted after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Ashcroft defended the policies as necessary to prevent another attack and strongly supported a sweeping anti-terror law, the Patriot Act, that gave the government the power to tap phones, track Internet usage and cell phones and detain immigrants. But in a major blow for Ashcroft,

on June 28 this year the US Supreme Court rejected the administration's position in a pair of rulings and said terror suspects could use the American judicial system to challenge their confinement.

A month before that, Ashcroft warned at a news conference that al Qaeda planned in the next few months to attack the United States. The attack never occurred, and Ashcroft was criticized for failing to give any details and for scaring people.

"The demands of justice are both rewarding and depleting," Ashcroft said in a handwritten resignation letter to Bush dated Nov. 2, the day the president was re-elected. "I take great personal satisfaction in the record which has been developed: The safety of Americans from crime and terror has been achieved."

Police break up Kashmir protests

AFP, Kashmir

Riot police fired teargas Wednesday to break up a fourth day of protests in revolt-hit Indian Kashmir over the alleged rape of a girl and her mother by Indian troops, police said.

Several hundred demonstrators, shouting "God is great, punish the guilty," retaliated by hurling back the exploded teargas shells at police and pelting them with stones and bricks.

The clashes erupted in Srinagar, summer capital of India's only Muslim-majority state, racked by a deadly 15-year-old insurgency against New Delhi's rule.

Seven demonstrators and five policemen were injured, police said. Eight protesters were taken into custody.

There have been four days of protests since the rioter's daughter reported the alleged sexual assault, the third such accusa-

tion against Indian forces in less than two weeks.

Indian army chief General N.C. Vij has taken charge of an army probe into the newest claim, demanding its completion within a week. Anyone found guilty "will be expeditiously dealt with," his office said in a statement.

The major who led the search of the family's house has been transferred to other duties "pending inquiries," an army spokesman said.

Doctors conducted physical examinations of the mother and daughter but no report has been made public. The scenic Himalayan state's government has also announced an investigation.

Mehbooba Mufti, daughter of Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, and president of the regional ruling Peoples Democratic Party, branded the alleged incident "brutal and shameful".



Kashmiri Muslim men hurl rocks at policemen in clouds of teargas during a protest in Srinagar, yesterday. Several people were hurt when police baton-charged a group of Kashmiris protesting at the alleged rape reported over the weekend of a Muslim girl and her mother by Indian troops, police and witnesses said. Clashes broke out after several hundred Muslims, mostly youths, took to the streets chanting anti-government and anti-army slogans.

Gunmen kill three outside Karachi mosque

AFP, Karachi

Unidentified gunmen shot dead three members of a Pakistani religious party here overnight in an apparent row over donations during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, police said Wednesday.

The assailants opened fire on members of the Karachi-based Sunni Tehreek outside a mosque in the city's Shah Faisal Colony neighbourhood late Tuesday and fled in a vehicle, leaving three people dead and four injured, senior police officer Mushtaq Shah said.

The incident has nothing to do with sectarianism, Shah told AFP.

The group has blamed the ethnic-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) for the killings, Shah said.

He said the incident could be linked to the collection of donations during Ramadan, when Muslims offer cash to help the poor, religious groups, charitable organisations and welfare bodies.

Uma Bharti suspended from BJP

PTI, New Delhi

Firebrand BJP leader Uma Bharti was suspended yesterday from BJP and removed as general secretary on a charge of indiscipline after she defiantly walked out of a party meeting demanding action against some leaders who she alleged were planting news against her in the media.

The party also issued a show cause notice to the 45-year-old leader asking her why she should not be expelled.

The dramatic developments, climaxing a month-long cold war between Bharti and former BJP President M Venkaiah Naidu and Prasad Mahajan, took place in full glare of television cameras, something unknown to BJP.

Bharti, who resigned as Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister in August following revival of a criminal case

against her in Karnataka, was suspended from the party shortly after "on account of her conduct" on the demand of office bearers, senior party leader Jaswant Singh said.

The backward face of BJP, who is also a leading participant in the Ram temple movement, has often spoken out on issues in the party and was only last week made general secretary after a show of reluctance.

As the first meeting of newly appointed office bearers was on in which Advani referred to quarrelling among party leaders through the media and pointedly referred to Bharti saying "there is a limit to how much departure from discipline can be tolerated." This provoked Bharti who got up and attacked "four-five" leaders in the meeting who she charged with spreading stories against her in off the record briefings. She demanded a discussion on the issue.

As a shocked triumvirate of BJP Minister LK Advani, former Prime Minister LK Advani and Jaswant Singh, sitting on the dais, she left the hall in the party headquarters when Advani dismissed her demand for discussion.

Bharti, who has been at the centre of intra-party wranglings ever since she stepped down as Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and was in a row with former Party president M Venkaiah Naidu, Pramod Mahajan and Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, was red with anger as she left the hall.

"There are four-five people in this hall who do the off the record briefings (against her) which appear as headlines and people like here were not similarly capable. So we are forced to save our honour by being compelled to speak on record and that is being branded as indiscipline," she said as she walked out.

Rahul Gandhi hits out at Thackeray

PTI, Amethi

Hitting back at Bal Thackeray, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi said on Tuesday that the Sena supremo should concentrate on "doing something" for Maharashtra instead of looking for a bride for him.

"I shall definitely consider the recommendation of Thackeray," Rahul quipped when pointed out that the Sena supremo had said that he would look for a "Hindustani bride" for him.

He, however, replied with an emphatic no when asked whether he would be "seeing" the girl recommended by Thackeray.

The first-time MP asked Thackeray to do "something for Maharashtra instead of looking for a bride for him."

"I am open to suggestions and proposals from any quarters on any matter. I am still learning. Even if some one abuses me I shall hear it but the decision would be mine," said Rahul.

Mahathir says Muslims will be "tortured" by Bush

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Former Malaysian premier Mahathir Mohamad said Sunday that Muslims would be "tortured" for the next four years after US President George W. Bush won a second term.

"We are sad that this man who has caused the mass killings in Iraq has been re-elected to lead his country," Mahathir told some 300 people at a gathering to break fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

"So for the next four years, the world's Muslim community will be tortured by this heartless and merciless man," he said.

Mahathir had last month predicted that Bush would win the November 2 election because Americans were "very ignorant" people and would "accept a liar".

Mahathir, who retired in October 2003 after 22 years in power, told The Star in an interview last month that the US electorate "appears to be willing to accept a person who told a blatant lie and to elect a liar as their president."

"The American people are, by and large, very ignorant and know nothing about the rest of the world. They think that America is the world," he said.



Mahathir Mohamad, former prime minister of Malaysia, delivers his keynote address at the closing of the Businessweek CEO Forum, in Beijing yesterday. Mahathir spoke on a topic entitled "The Leadership Edge: Building the Future of Asia".

Kerry vows to press on with agenda in Senate

REUTERS, Washington

John Kerry returned to the US Capitol on Tuesday, vowed to fight on in the Senate for the changes sought by supporters of his failed US presidential bid and did not rule out another White House run.

"Fifty-four plus million Americans voted for health care, they voted for energy independence, they voted for unity in America, they voted for stem-cell research, they voted for protecting Social Security," the four-term senator from Massachusetts told reporters as he met with two top Democratic congressional leaders.

"We need to be unified," Kerry said in his first public comments since conceding defeat to President Bush in last Tuesday's election.

"We have a very clear agenda, and I'm going to be fighting for that agenda with all of the energy that I have and all of the passion I brought to the campaign," Kerry said.

Kerry did not rule out another White House bid, but joked about a comment by his brother, Cameron, in The Boston Globe on Tuesday that such a run is "conceivable."

"It's inconceivable to me that anyone is even talking about that stuff right now," said Kerry, flanked by

Senate Minority Whip Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat, and House of Representatives Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat.

"We have a lot of things to talk about, a lot of things to do," Kerry said.

While Democrat Al Gore adopted a relatively low profile immediately after losing the 2000 White House race to Bush, Kerry clearly intends to remain in the spotlight.

Having spent most of the past year on the campaign trail, he plans to return to the Senate next week when Congress holds what is expected to be a brief post-election session.

The new 109th Congress is to convene in January with Republicans enjoying bolstered majorities in the House and Senate, thanks to last week's election.

Kerry met on Tuesday with Reid and Pelosi in the House Democrat's leadership office and discussed their plans as members of the minority party on Capitol Hill.

As television cameras rolled, Pelosi said, "I want to tell Senator Kerry how proud we were of him and are of him. His candidacy for president of the United States energized America.... His legacy is a great one, but it will continue, I'm sure."

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Tender Notice. Office of the Director General, Directorate of Youth Development, Ministry of Youth and Sports, 108, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000. Memo No. DYD/YTC/Cox's Bazar-CWE/28/2004-121. Dated: 26/10/04. Sealed tenders in Bangladesh Form No-2911 are invited from eligible contractors/contractor's firms renewed in 2004-2005 financial year for execution of the undermentioned work of Cox's Bazar Youth Training Centre under the Project titled "Establishment of 18 New Youth Training Centres (1st Phase-8 Centres)" of the Directorate of Youth Development.