

Gunmen kill 23 in bus attack in Honduras

REUTERS, Tegucigalpa

At least 23 people were killed in the northern industrial city of San Pedro Sula on Thursday when gunmen sprayed a public bus with bullets and left a menacing message for crime-busting politicians, police said.

At least four men in two cars forced the bus to the side of the road and opened fire on it with assault rifles.

"Sixteen people died at the scene of the attack, and seven more died in hospital," police official Wilmer Torres told Reuters. "As well, there are at least 10 wounded."

Most of the passengers were returning home from work in Honduras' second largest city. Four of the dead were children, Torres said.

The gunmen, armed with M-16 and AK-47 military rifles, left a message written on cardboard at the scene, challenging the president and leading politicians who have taken a tough stance against organized crime.

"This is a threat not against me or (Security Minister) Oscar Alvarez or (Defense Minister) Federico Breve, but against all Hondurans," said President Ricardo Maduro.

Rumsfeld visits US soldiers in Iraq

AP, Mosul

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, on a Christmas Eve mission to cheer up the troops in Iraq, promised them that no matter how bleak things might look at any one moment they will look back on their mission with pride.

"There's no doubt in my mind, this is achievable," he told troops in Mosul just three days after the devastating attack on a US military dining hall here.

"When it looks bleak, when one worries about how it's going to come out, when one reads and hears the naysayers and the doubters who say it can't be done, and that we're in a quagmire here," one should recall that there have been such doubters "throughout every conflict in the history of the world," he told about 200 soldiers of the 1st Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division at their commander's headquarters.

Traveling in secrecy amid tight security, Rumsfeld landed in pre-

dawn darkness and immediately headed for a combat surgical hospital where many of the bombing victims were treated after Tuesday's lunchtime attack on a mess tent. The most seriously wounded already have been transferred to a US military hospital in Germany.

At a later stop in Tikrit, the hometown of deposed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Rumsfeld met with the commander of the 1st Infantry Division, Maj. Gen. John Batiste.

Batiste said that 90 percent of the threat in his area, which covers four provinces in northcentral and northeastern Iraq is from former Baathist regime elements.

He told Rumsfeld the ground-work is being laid for successful elections in this part of Iraq, which is predominantly Sunni.

Standing under a bright sun on a brisk morning, Rumsfeld addressed a group of about 250 soldiers gathered outside Batiste's headquarters, thanking them for their service and

wishing them holiday greetings.

His third stop was in Fallujah, where Marine infantrymen fought with insurgents on Thursday as warplanes and tanks bombarded guerrilla positions in the heaviest fighting there in weeks.

However, all seemed quiet as he met with Marines at their main base outside the city on Friday.

"What's taking place here is at a stage where a great many people doubt whether or not it can be accomplished," he said, rephrasing the theme he struck in Mosul.

But he reminded about 200 Marines eating lunch in a mess hall adorned with several small plastic trees and homemade Christmas decorations that repressive regimes in Germany and the former Soviet Union had been removed and said he was confident freedom would prevail in Iraq.

"All I can say is, people basically want to be free," he said to cheers and applause in the refurbished brick-and-plaster Iraqi building.



PHOTO: AFP

Soldiers from Task Force Danger gather around to meet US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld at Forward Operating Base Danger, in Tikrit, northern Iraq yesterday. Rumsfeld acknowledged "setbacks" in Iraq during a visit with US marines today at their main base outside Fallujah, after visiting troops in Tikrit and Mosul.

Powell urged Bush, Blair to boost troops in Iraq: Report

REUTERS, Washington

US Secretary of State Colin Powell told his President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair last month that there were too few troops in Iraq, The Washington Post reported on Friday.

Citing people familiar with records of the private talks, the newspaper said Powell's advice came 10 days after the end of the presidential campaign, during intense discussions on Iraq between Bush and Blair.

Less than three weeks after the Nov. 12, White House meeting, the Pentagon said it would boost the US military presence in Iraq by 12,000 troops, the newspaper said.

The Pentagon announced on Dec. 1 that a force of 138,000 U.S. troops currently in Iraq would be increased by the end of December to 150,000, the highest level since the war began in March 2003, to improve security for scheduled Jan. 30, Iraqi elections.



PHOTO: AFP
Indian defence officials follow the body of former Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao wrapped in the tricolor as it is carried towards a waiting aircraft at Palam Airport, in New Delhi yesterday.

Rao to be cremated in Hyderabad

PTI, Hyderabad

Former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao will be cremated here Saturday on the banks of the picturesque Hussain Sagar Lake that divides the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

The veteran Congress leader, seen as the man who initiated the path-breaking economic reforms in the country in the early nineties, passed away Thursday at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences after a prolonged battle with cardiac diseases.

The decision to change the cremation site was taken after Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y S Rajasekhar Reddy had talks with Narasimha Rao's sons, P V Ranga Rao and P V Rajeswara Rao, and other family members on Thursday night in New Delhi.

Though the family had earlier decided to perform his last rites in the national capital, the chief minister convinced the family to cremate him in Hyderabad.

Fresh fighting in Falluja scares away returnees

AFP, Near Falluja

Some Falluja residents decided against returning to their war-tattered city Friday when fighting erupted for a second straight day in the former rebel stronghold.

About 10 cars had entered a checkpoint when a succession of small explosions shot up clouds of smoke, an AFP reporter witnessed.

Amid the sounds of fighting inside Falluja, a number of the 25 cars lined up at a checkpoint to enter the city decided to leave rather than venture inside the war zone they had fled ahead of last month's US offensive to reclaim the city of 300,000 from rebels.

About 900 residents returned to the war-scarred city Thursday on the

first day the Iraqi government and US military had welcomed people back to their city since the campaign to root out insurgents began on November 8.

The return of citizens Thursday unfolded despite fierce fighting in northern Falluja that saw US forces call in an air strike on a building.

Three US marines were also killed Thursday in Falluja's province of Al-Anbar, although the military declined to say if the deaths occurred during the Falluja skirmishes.

So far, the US military and Iraqi government has restricted access in Falluja to residents of a single neighbourhood -- the southwestern Al-Andalus business district -- and was still imposing a strict 6:00 pm (1500

GMT) curfew.

The government expects 2,000 people to return and US and Iraqi government troops are carrying out rigorous identity checks to ensure only residents of the one neighbourhood out of the city's 18 were let in.

The returnees are entering an apocalyptic backdrop of flattened city blocks and bullet-scarred homes, where wild dogs and cats have feasted on corpses and the sour smell of the dead filled the streets for weeks.

The Iraqi government has been pushing for preparations to be stepped up for the return of residents, who have been forced to stay with relatives, squat in schools or shiver in camps until they can regain their homes.

Advani lifts Uma Bharti's suspension

PTI, New Delhi

More than a month after she openly challenged his authority, BJP President LK Advani on Friday revoked suspension of firebrand leader Uma Bharti, capping days of drama of her regret and a reported attack on the second ringleaders.

"BJP President LK Advani has decided to lift the suspension on Uma Bharti," former party President M Venkiah Naidu said.

He, however, replied in the negative when asked whether she would get back the post of General Secretary, to which she was appointed only a few days before she stormed out of the party office bearers' meeting on November 10 demanding action against "leaders without base".

Jinnah beats Gandhi in BBC poll: Report

ANI, Islamabad

Pakistan's founder and a strong advocate of the two nation theory, Muhammad Ali Jinnah has been regarded as the most important and influential leader in South Asia, courtesy a poll.

According to the Daily Times, the poll conducted by BBC to find the most influential South Asian leader has revealed that as many as 39 percent of the people surveyed believed Jinnah to be the most important leader in South Asia.

The question put forth by the BBC as to "Who did they consider to be the most important leader in South Asia in modern times" secured 36 percent votes for Mahatma Gandhi and 21 percent votes for Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

Interestingly, out of the total 335,422 people surveyed, while former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Indira Gandhi secured a mere one percent, India's first Premier Jawaharlal Nehru secured zero percent votes.

The list of 16 personalities chosen for the voting included: Ahmed Shah Masood, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, BP Koirala, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, JR Jayawardene, Mahatma Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Subhash Chandra Bose, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Ziaur Rahman, Zahir Shah and Ziaul Haq.

Thailand's prime minister said Friday he held three of his top military commanders in the restive south responsible for the deaths of dozens of Muslim protesters after security forces broke up an October riot.

Thaksin Shinawatra held a two-hour meeting Friday with the chairman of the independent commission appointed by the government to investigate the events at the town of Tak Bai, in Narathiwat province,

Campaign ends in Ukraine

BBC NEWS ONLINE

The two candidates in Ukraine's presidential election are making their final appeals to voters ahead of the repeat of last month's disputed poll.

Friday is the last day of campaigning in the bitterly fought race, which will be decided in the vote on Sunday.

There will be televised speeches from Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych and his political rival, Viktor Yushchenko.

Election observers from the European Union, the US, Nato and other bodies are preparing to monitor the voting.

Yanukovych was originally declared the winner of November's

run-off.

But the result was annulled by the Supreme Court on the grounds of widespread fraud. That decision followed weeks of street protests by Yushchenko's supporters, in what became known as the "Orange Revolution".

Yushchenko is now reported to be enjoying a comfortable, 14-point lead in the opinion polls.

He broadly favours closer ties with western Europe, something his opponents say will alienate Russia, Ukraine's main trading partner.

Yanukovych has warned that if his opponent wins, it could split the country, while Mr Yushchenko claims that the authorities may try to rig the vote.

New Afghan cabinet sworn in

AFP, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai on Friday swore in a new cabinet which sidelines powerful warlords and brings in reformers to battle drugs and rebuild the shattered country.

Karzai took the oaths of 27 ministers he named late Thursday, just over two weeks after his own inauguration as the first democratically-elected Afghan leader.

In a ceremony at the presidential palace in Kabul, the new cabinet members swore with their right hands on the Koran to defend Islam, the constitution and Afghanistan in the name of Allah.

Interior Minister Ali Ahmed Jalali and Commerce Minister Hidayatullah

Amin Asala were abroad while Urban Development Minister Yusuf Pashtun and Mohammed Sediq, Minister for Mines and Industry, were also absent, a presidential aide told AFP.

Seven weeks after he was officially announced winner of the historic October 9 election, Karzai appointed a government including two women and many English-speaking technocrats considered his close allies.

Ousted were former defence minister Mohammed Qasim Fahim and former education minister Yunus Qanooni, two powerful ethnic Tajik figures with the Northern Alliance which toppled the Taliban regime in 2001 with US assistance.

Thai PM blames army officials for riot deaths

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's prime minister said Friday he held three of his top military commanders in the restive south responsible for the deaths of dozens of Muslim protesters after security forces broke up an October riot.

Thaksin Shinawatra held a two-hour meeting Friday with the chairman of the independent commission appointed by the government to investigate the events at the town of Tak Bai, in Narathiwat province,

before naming those he believed were to blame for the deaths in

military custody of 79 protesters.

"There were three people responsible for the incident: the southern army commander (Lieutenant General Pisarn Wattanongkeree); his deputy (Major Sinchai Nussathit); and the Fourth Army area field commander (Major Chalermchai Wirunpruech)."

The three failed to personally oversee all aspects of the incident, which turned into a tragedy when the military detained the protesters, bound their hands behind their backs and loaded them onto military trucks for transport, Thaksin told reporters.

Responsibilities include but not limited to:

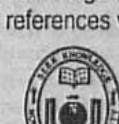
- Overall supervision of technical and personnel operations of NSU Information services department
- Develop and implement plans, policies, procedures for central network system and the department
- Maintain & update NSU web page, online advising system
- Procure and setup hardware, software and computer accessories
- Capability to handle VSAT and allied matters
- Administer central PABX system of the university
- Handle wireless network

Age limit: 45 years

Salary: Gross monthly salary of TK. 68,750/- (including 40% house rent allowance and a medical allowance) in the pay scale of TK. 37,500-3,750-75,000; higher salary for specially deserving candidate.

Other benefits: Provident fund, Gratuity, Festival bonus, Group insurance, In-house free medical consultation etc.

Candidates satisfying the requirements may submit CV mentioning all academic results, job experience etc. and name of 2 references with a PP size photograph by 16 January 2005 to:



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Leader of Pakistan's six-party Islamic alliance the Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) Hafiz Hussain Ahmed, speaks to a public gathering in Islamabad yesterday. MMA are staging a nationwide protest against the government on the issue of the deletion of the column for religion from the new machine-readable passports.