

Attack on Kashmir rally leaves 2 dead

AFP, Srinagar

Two people were killed and 60 wounded after militants launched a gun and grenade attack Tuesday on a political rally in Indian Kashmir, police said.

Ghulam Hassan Mir, a former tourism minister holding the rally, was slightly injured when the militants attacked in Baramulla district, 40 kilometres north of the summer capital Srinagar.

More than 40 of the injured were taken to Srinagar's main hospital from the scene of the attacks in the town of Tangmarg, police said. They said eight of the injured were policemen guarding the rally.

"The attack took place when the people were dispersing after attending the former minister's rally," Indian Kashmir's police chief Gopal Sharma said.

Witnesses said more than 5,000 villagers had attended the gathering.

Israel, Palestinians agree on Gaza border deal

AP, Jerusalem

Israel and the Palestinians agreed Tuesday on a detailed arrangement for opening the borders of the Gaza Strip and allowing freer movement for Palestinians elsewhere, a significant step toward an eventual peace deal between historic enemies.

It took all-night negotiations and a strong diplomatic shove from US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to get a deal whose basic elements had been in the works for weeks.

"I have to say as a football fan, sometimes the last yard is the hardest, and I think we experienced that today," Rice told a news conference.

Rice oversaw the marathon negotiations in a Jerusalem hotel, huddling alternately with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in her suite. She had postponed a planned departure for Asia by a day to shepherd the deal to a conclusion.

On Tuesday morning, she met with

Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz to finalize the details.

Rice praised the deal as a "big step forward" in Israeli-Palestinian relations, bruised by nearly five years of bloody fighting.

"This agreement is intended to give Palestinian people the freedom to move, to trade, to live ordinary lives," she said.

A deal to free up Palestinian movement while satisfying Israeli concerns about terrorism is a statement of progress beyond the technical issues at hand.

The agreement gives the Palestinians control over a border for the first time and provides a much-needed boost to the shattered Gaza economy. The deal also strengthens Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas ahead of Jan. 25 parliament elections and could help him fend off a strong challenge by the Islamic militant group Hamas.

Rice and international Mideast envoy James Wolfensohn badly wanted Israel and the Palestinian leadership to use Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip last summer as traction for tougher peace negotiations down the road.

Cooperation flagged in recent weeks, and Rice's two days of meetings in Jerusalem and the West Bank were meant to push the two sides to settle nitty-gritty disputes over Palestinian movement in and out of the territory they now control. "Underneath what may seem like very small details there are hard issues," Rice told reporters.

She said she only got about two hours of sleep.

Wolfensohn said the deal cleared the way for the international community to assist the Palestinians and help revive Gaza's economy. Donor countries have pledged hundreds of millions of dollars, but the money was held up by the lack of a border deal.

China to honour ousted reformist leader

AFP, Beijing

China announced it will commemorate the 90th birthday of a late Communist Party leader whose death sparked the 1989 Tiananmen uprising, with sources saying the ceremony will be Friday.

"In the middle of November, a commemoration to mark the 90th anniversary of Hu Yaobang will be held in Beijing," foreign ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said Tuesday, without giving a specific date for the event.

"The central leadership, the party, political and military and other leaders from the grassroots will be present at the meeting, and the central leadership will deliver a speech."

The statement marks the first time since the Tiananmen pro-democracy movement that Chinese authorities have told the foreign press they are holding an event to honour the democratically inclined leader's birthday.



Pakistani firefighters attempt to extinguish a fire sparked by a blast in Karachi yesterday. A car bomb at an outlet of a US fast food chain in Pakistan's largest city Karachi killed two people and not the six reported earlier by an ambulance service, police and the government said.

PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: AFP

Foreign protestors carry placards in protest of US President George W. Bush's visit to Japan, in Kyoto yesterday. Bush arrived in Japan at the start of a week-long trip to Asia, during which he will attend the Asia-Pacific summit in South Korea.

Bush opens Asia trip in Japan

AFP, Kyoto

US President George W. Bush was due in Japan on a week-long trip to Asia, hoping for progress on the North Korean nuclear crisis and aiming for action against deadly bird flu.

After a refueling stop at a military base in Alaska, the US president headed for Kyoto, where he was to tour Japan's most-visited Buddhist temple on Wednesday before holding talks with Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi.

Bush was to give in Japan what aides described as the keynote speech of his trip, praising China for loosening

controls on its economy and urging Beijing to follow up by giving its citizens greater political and religious freedom.

The president was then to travel to South Korea and attend an Asia-Pacific summit there, make an official visit to China and become the first sitting US president to travel to Mongolia before heading back to Washington.

At home, he faced his worst poll numbers ever, anger over the unpopular war in Iraq, and a CIA leak investigation that led to the indictment and resignation of a senior aide and is still swirling around his White House.

French PM visits riot-hit areas

REUTERS, Aulnay-Sous-Bois

French Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin made an unexpected visit on Tuesday to a Paris suburb that has been hit by riots as parliament prepared to approve an extension of emergency powers.

Villepin traveled to Aulnay-sous-Bois northeast of Paris a day after

President Jacques Chirac said in a national address that the worst civil unrest in almost 40 years pointed to a deep national malaise and identity crisis.

The prime minister met local residents, teachers and business leaders during the previously unannounced visit, his first to an area that has been hit by rioting by youths who feel excluded from mainstream society.

"During our meeting this morning I heard a lot of people who really want to make progress, to get ahead, realize their projects, find a job. They should be helped," Villepin said afterwards.

"Of course we must be mobilized against the feeling of injustice and against discrimination. It's an every day struggle which should mobilize us all, every French man and woman," said Villepin, who also vowed to be firm with lawbreakers.

Northern Japan rattled by strong earthquake

AP, Tokyo

A powerful earthquake shook northern Japan early Tuesday, and small tsunami waves struck coastal towns about 200 miles from the epicenter. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

The quake, with a preliminary magnitude of 7.1, hit at 6:39 a.m. (4:39 p.m. Monday EST) and was centered just below the ocean bottom off the east coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, Japan's Meteorological Agency said.

Small tsunami waves measuring 12 and 20 inches hit the coastal city of Ofunato and smaller waves hit at least four other towns. Tsunami waves generated by earthquakes are often barely noticeable in the ocean but can rise to great heights once they arrive at shore.

Ross Stein, a geophysicist with the USGS in Menlo Park, Calif., said the swell amounted to "a surfable tsunami."

The quake hit at a depth of about 18 miles and was centered off the coast of Sanriku in northern Japan, 330 miles east of Tokyo, the US Geological Survey said. It shook buildings across a wide area across northern and eastern Honshu, including Tokyo, and Hokkaido.

Jordan 'bomber' had brothers killed in Iraq

AFP, Amman

An Iraqi woman who dramatically confessed on Jordanian television to her role in the deadly multiple bombings on Amman hotels last week had three brothers killed by US forces in Iraq, officials said Tuesday.

They said the woman, Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi, 35, had provided few leads apart from her apparent motivation and the investigation was now focused on whether the bombers had accomplices in Jordan.

A security source said Samer al-Rishawi, a right-hand man of Iraq's most wanted man Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, was among the three brothers killed by US forces battling insurgents in the west of the country.

Samer was a cell leader for Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born Al-Qaeda frontman in Iraq, for the volatile Al-Anbar province, the source said.

Open Guantanamo Bay for inspection

UN gives ultimatum to Washington

AFP, Vienna

The United States has until Thursday to confirm it will allow United Nations inspectors open access to detainees at the Guantanamo Bay prison camp in Cuba, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak, said here Tuesday.

The UN intends to send inspectors to the base on December 6 to investigate allegations of torture at the military-run prison and wants them to have free access to detainees, something Washington has so far refused to grant.

"The absence of a conclusive answer by midnight (2300 GMT) on Thursday will be taken as a refusal," Nowak told AFP.

"The situation is very clear: if the United States does not accept our

conditions, we will not go," Nowak added.

Nowak and his team are due to draw up a report by the end of December on the conditions under which detainees are being held at the camp and will present their findings to the UN Commissioner for Human Rights in March.

"The report will be written whatever happens," Nowak insisted. "We are in a position to assess the situation (in Guantanamo Bay) on the basis of eye witness accounts but obviously it would be preferable for all concerned if we could carry out a proper first-hand inspection."

However, he warned: "For us to go to Guantanamo Bay without our conditions having been met would set a negative precedent for all other countries."

Israeli PM's son pleads guilty to perjury

AFP, Tel Aviv

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's son Omri pleaded guilty Tuesday to charges of providing false testimony and falsifying documents at an outlet of a Tel Aviv court.

The trial follows a police investigation into allegations of illegal financing of Ariel Sharon's successful 1999 campaign for the leadership of his right-wing Likud party.

Although the sentence has yet to be decided, Omri's guilty plea will automatically mean that he has to step down as a Likud MP.

Israeli public radio's legal affairs commentator Moshé Negbi said the false testimony charge carried a prison sentence of up to seven years and the forgery charge up to five.

Attorney general Menachem Mazuz decided to press charges against Omri Sharon in July but had to wait until a bill was passed limiting MPs' immunity against prosecution.