

Indian court rejects Afzal's appeal

India's Supreme Court has rejected a mercy appeal filed by a Kashmiri Muslim man sentenced to death for conspiracy in a deadly 2001 attack on parliament that nearly brought India and Pakistan to war.

The decision, handed down late Friday, ends Mohammed Afzal Guru's chances of a legal review of his sentence. His last hope is a mercy petition already submitted to Indian President Abdul Kalam.

Guru was convicted in 2002 and sentenced to death for plotting the assault by Islamic militants, which left 15 people dead, including the five attackers.

The sentence has drawn appeals for clemency from human rights activists and Indian newspaper editorials. A former chief minister of Kashmir has warned that India will "go up in flames" if Guru is hanged.

India blamed the attack against what it called "the heart of Indian democracy" on Pakistan-backed militants fighting its rule in Indian Kashmir.

But Islamabad denied any role in the attack, which brought the nuclear-armed neighbours close to war.

Guru had argued in his appeal to the Supreme Court that he was the victim of a "gross miscarriage of justice" and asked for the case to be reviewed.

But the court said the plea had "no merit".

His execution was originally scheduled for October but was postponed after Guru, who has pleaded his innocence, appealed for mercy.

Nato soldier killed in Afghanistan

A Nato soldier was killed in a clash with insurgents in southern Afghanistan early Saturday, the 37-nation Nato-led International Security Assistance Force said.

The soldier was the first foreign serviceman to die in Afghanistan this year after about 170 were killed in 2006.

Last year was the deadliest in a Taliban-led insurgency launched after the hardliners were booted from government in 2001.

The soldier was killed when insurgents engaged International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops. The troops called in air support and retaliated, ISAF said in a statement that gave no other details.



A child sits in the aisle of an overcrowded admission test hall at Government Laboratory School in the capital yesterday. The child did so due to lack of space on the benches.

Bush admin seeks \$86m in military aid from Congress for Palestinians

The administration of President George W. Bush has asked Congress to authorize 86 million dollars in military aid to boost security forces loyal to moderate Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas, a senior US official said Friday.

"Eighty-six million is the figure we're looking at with Congress, that's our starting point," said State Department spokesman Sean McCormack.

He said the aid would be "non-lethal assistance" including communications gear, vehicles and uniforms as well as training.

"It's needed, and we think it's an important part of helping to build up responsible security forces that report directly to president Abbas," he told reporters.

McCormack released the figure hours before US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was due to leave Washington for talks with Abbas and Israeli leaders at the start of a weeklong tour of the Middle East and Europe that will also take her to Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Germany and Britain.

Rice has said the talks are unlikely to yield any kind of a breakthrough in the long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Last month, Egypt, with Israel's consent, sent a large quantity of automatic weapons and ammunition to Abbas loyalist forces and Washington has been pressing the Jewish state to allow a Jordan-based Palestinian militia linked to Fatah deploy in the Gaza Strip, a Hamas stronghold.

Rice has been seeking ways to strengthen Abbas and his secular

Fatah party in an increasingly violent power struggle with the radical Islamic movement Hamas.

Hamas, which refuses to recognise Israel's right to exist, gained control of the Palestinian self-rule government following elections a year ago, prompting a financial and diplomatic boycott of the administration.

Abbas attempted for months last year to negotiate a power-sharing deal with Hamas that could produce a government willing to recognise Israel and formally renounce violence — conditions set down by the international community for an end to the aid boycott and resumed negotiations with Israel.

Those talks broke down in November, and Abbas subsequently announced that he would call new elections for both the legislature and his presidential office.

The move was risky, since Fatah

is not assured of beating Hamas in new polls, and sparked violent clashes between the two sides' rival security services that have threatened to degenerate into a civil war.

McCormack denied suggestions that beefing up Fatah-led security forces could fuel the factional violence.

"We think that we are building up those responsible forces that will help provide security for the Palestinian people," he said.

A key task of the enhanced Fatah forces would be to counter militant attacks on Israel, leading to an easing of travel restrictions in the occupied territories and at crossings into Israel which have badly harmed the local economy, he said.

"These are forces that will also be committed to fighting terror and to preventing terrorist attacks," he said.



Garment workers of Kas Factory at Dewanhat stage a demonstration putting up barricade on Sheikh Mujib Road in Chittagong city yesterday demanding payment of outstanding salaries.

Ctg RMG workers block road for arrear salary, bonus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Over 300 garment workers here yesterday put up barricade at Dewanhat intersection demanding their arrear salary and Eid bonus.

The agitating workers also damaged two CNG-driven auto rickshaws during the demonstration.

Hundreds of commuters at both ends of the highway fell victim to a serious gridlock due to two and a half-hour-long barricade that began at around 12:30pm.

Sources said the workers of Kason Fashion Private Limited and Kass Garments Private Limited belonging to same owner at Dewanhat blockaded the highway demanding payment of arrear salary for the month of December and festival bonus of Eid-ul-Azha.

The workers alleged that the garment authorities always delay in paying them and this time they forced the workers to

celebrate the Eid without salary and bonus.

Rahat Chowdhury, a worker in the sewing department of Kason Fashion, said the authorities were unwilling to pay their arrear salary even this month and this forced them to put up the barricade.

Police from nearby Double Mooring Police Station and a team of Rab-7 immediately rushed to the spot but failed to remove the barricade as of 3:00pm when they assured the workers of helping them in this regard.

Later at a meeting, the owner of the garment assured the workers of paying their salary by today.

Assistant Commissioner (AC) of Double Mooring Zone Tofayel Ahmed Mia, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Double Mooring Police Station Khandaker Rezaul Hasan, Deputy Assistant Director of Rab-7 Md Shahadat and Managing Director of both the garments Md Solaiman were present at the meeting.

Rice arrives in Israel at start of ME tour

AFP, Tel Aviv

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived yesterday in Israel, where she will take another crack at reviving the peace process but without a specific plan to resolve the conflict.

Rice is due to meet with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Defence Minister Amir Peretz in Jerusalem Saturday evening. On Sunday, she heads to the West Bank for talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.