

Indian police have orders to shoot rioters

INTERNATIONAL
AHMADABAD, India — Chaos spread through this western Indian city today and the death toll over three days of Hindu-Muslim violence climbed to 246, despite patrols by hundreds of soldiers and orders for police to shoot rioters and arsonists on sight.

In the worst attack, 52 Muslims were killed as they slept in a shantytown after about 300 Hindus set their huts on fire, police said. After 27 bodies were pulled from the ashes, an additional 25 people died in the hospital; officials said 17 were being treated for serious burns.

The brutal Hindu reprisals are revenge for a Muslim attack on a train Wednesday, in which 58 people died, mostly Hindus.

The Gujarat state home secretary, K. Nityanandam, ordered police to shoot rioters and arsonists on sight Friday, and said 900 soldiers were patrolling the state capital, Ahmadabad, an industrial city of 3.5 million. But police said they could not control the spreading violence, as gangs blockaded roads, searched cars, set fire to shops and homes and fought each other.

BELGRADE, Yugoslavia — Each day since the start of Slobodan Milosevic’s war crimes trial, Radoslav Mitrovic and his friends have gathered for a beer at the St. Djordje cafe and settled in for the best TV show in town: their former president flaying witnesses against him.

“Slobo has destroyed them all, the war crimes court, those alleged witnesses, America, NATO, everyone,” Mitrovic said Wednesday, beaming at the way Milosevic grilled an ethnic Albanian witness who claimed mass murders and deportations by Serbian security forces during the 1999 Kosovo war.

The former Yugoslav president was swept from office in October 2000, arrested the following April and deported in June 2001 to face a United Nations tribunal in a humiliating process reflecting his fall from once-uncontested authority at home.

But reactions such as Mitrovic’s show that no matter what happens at the trial, “Slobo” is regaining support at home by defying the world.

Senate rejects ending no-fault divorce

TOPEKA (AP) — The Senate rejected a bill making it harder for some couples to divorce, after members argued over how far the state should go to save troubled marriages.

Under the bill, the state would permit no-fault divorce only for couples without dependent children living at home. No-fault divorce allows couples to end a marriage without one spouse having to allege wrongdoing by the other.

The vote Thursday was 15-25. Supporters said state law makes it too easy for one spouse to end a marriage. Sen. Ed Pugh, R-Wamego, said marriages take a lot of work — and pointed to his own.

“I may go home tonight and have a summons nailed to my head,” he joked. “I’ve given her plenty of reasons over the past 28 years.”

Critics said the state should not try to save troubled marriages when it doesn’t know the circumstances.

“I don’t believe this Legislature can engineer social relationships,” said Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman John Vratil, R-Leawood.

State law provides three general grounds for divorce: incompatibility, failure to perform a material marital duty, or mental illness or mental incapacity. There is no requirement that both spouses agree to the divorce.

NATIONAL
SANDIEGO — For weeks Danielle van Dam’s parents kept hoping as volunteers combed canyons and desert, looking for the 7-year-old who disappeared from her bedroom. The hopes and the hunt are over now: An autopsy has confirmed that a body found by a roadside was that of the missing girl.

Police Chief David Bejarano informed Danielle’s parents, Brenda and Damon van Dam, of the positive identification yesterday. The couple thanked volunteers at an office that had been used as a base for the search, then left quietly. They did not speak with reporters.

“They mentioned that Danielle’s in good hands now,” Bejarano said. “There’s a lot of tears and a lot of anger at dealing with the loss of their daughter.”

The Rev. Joseph Acton, who has been counseling the family, described the couple as devastated.

“Brenda said today that love conquers evil,” he said.

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Space shuttle Columbia and a crew of seven blasted into orbit today on an arduous mission to renovate the Hubble Space Telescope after a one-day wait for warmer launch weather.

Columbia vaulted into clouds just before dawn as Hubble was passing more than 350 miles above the Gulf of Mexico and heading toward the Florida peninsula. The round-and-round-the-world chase should end Sunday.

The launch was surrounded by extraordinarily tight security to guard against possible terrorist attack. F-15 fighter jets were on patrol, and a no-fly zone was in force within 35 miles of the launch pad.

Commander Scott Altman waved as he and his crew boarded the heavily guarded van for the ride to the pad. “The crowd goes wild, hey!” Altman shouted. The crowd, while enthusiastic, consisted of just 25 space center employees, fewer than usual because of security concerns.

It was balmy Thursday morning, when near-freezing temperatures forced a one-day delay. The mercury was up to 60 for Friday’s try.

“We wish you good luck on this very important mission to the Hubble Space Telescope and you all have fun up there,” launch director Mike Leinbach told the astronauts just before Columbia’s 6:22 a.m. liftoff.

STAMFORD, Conn. (AP) — An early suspect in the 1975 killing of a teen-ager who now has immunity in the case has hair that is similar to samples found at the crime scene, sources say.

Jury selection begins next month for Michael Skakel, a nephew of the late Sen. Robert Kennedy who is charged with murdering Martha Moxley. His lawyer, Michael Sherman, would not say whether he would try to raise doubt in jurors’ minds using the evidence linking another man, Kenneth Littleton, to the scene.

“We will make absolutely every effort to introduce all evidence that may exonerate Michael Skakel,” Sherman said, declining to be more specific.

Skakel is accused of beating Moxley to death with a golf club in their wealthy Greenwich neighborhood on Oct. 31, 1975. Skakel and Moxley were both 15 at the time.

WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON — Life can be rough for presidential press secretaries. Richard Nixon shoved his. One even went down with the Titanic.

More often, they spend their White House careers hoping not to invite their boss’ icy displeasure. Ari Fleischer had a day like that Thursday.

Smooth of voice, even tempered, a stick-to-the-script guy in a White House that demands utmost discipline, President Bush’s chief spokesman nevertheless went astray in a remark about the former Clinton administration.

Fleischer appeared to blame overreaching diplomacy by President Clinton for sparking more bloodshed in the Middle East. “In an attempt to shoot the moon and get nothing, more violence resulted,” he told reporters.

He issued a retraction later in the day, after going through what several White House advisers said was a mild admonishment by Bush and other superiors, and their firm insistence that he take it back.

WASHINGTON — A proposal call-

ing for major changes in the nation’s gasoline is being worked out in the Senate, a compromise plan that resolves long-standing differences between oil companies, farmers and environmentalists.

The tentative agreement would require a tripling of the amount of ethanol to be used in gasoline, a boon to the farming industry, while it also would ban the additive, MTBE, which has been blamed for fouling lakes and streams in a number of states.

And it would end the requirement that gasoline in areas of serious air pollution contain a certain amount of oxygen, a rule the oil companies say is outdated because they can blend fuel to meet air quality requirements.

While some details remained to be worked out, Senate negotiators — and the unusual alliance of frequently feud-

ing interest groups — have reached general agreement on the plan, several participants in the discussions said Thursday.

The role of ethanol in gasoline and the future of MTBE, the fossil-fuel based additive that is under attack from New England to California for polluting waterways, has been the subject of intense political jockeying in Congress for years.

WASHINGTON — A Pentagon laboratory is creating a genetic profile from tissue specimens recovered from a site in Afghanistan where the CIA attacked what it believed were three al-Qaida terrorists.

U.S. officials do not believe the three victims included Osama bin Laden, the al-Qaida leader whom the United States blames for the Sept. 11 attacks. But they are eager to establish the iden-

ties of the three, in part to counter claims that they were innocent Afghans hunting for scrap metal.

Christopher Kelly, spokesman for the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, said Thursday the institute received a small amount of “biological material” on Feb. 15, 11 days after the CIA attack. He said the institute hopes to complete a genetic profile within two weeks.

The material was collected by U.S. authorities in the Zawar Khili area in eastern Afghanistan at a remote site where a CIA-operated Predator drone aircraft launched a Hellfire missile at the trio U.S. officials believe were al-Qaida leaders.

Afghans in the Zawar Khili area later told reporters the three men were innocents who had been searching for scrap metal.

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