

After 20 years, Brunei walks democracy path

Associated Press
Bandar Seri Begawan, Sept. 25

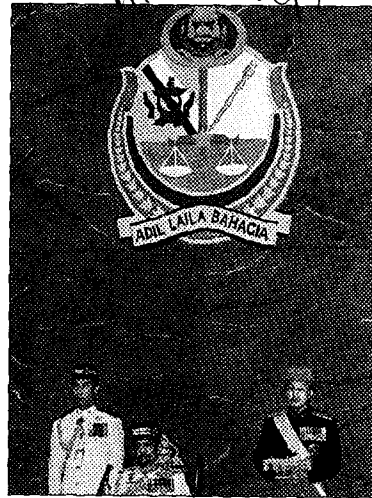
BRUNEI'S ABSOLUTE ruler convened the tiny oil-rich sultanate's legislature for the first time in two decades on Saturday to mull constitutional amendments expected to further strengthen his rule.

But Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah promised the amendments would also bring more openness and public consultation. "These changes will enable us to protect and nurture the importance of the people and the country", Hassanal said after swearing in the 21 appointed members of the State Legislative Council. "We must start this process carefully. I will monitor the work and effectiveness of the creation of the state council ... and will decide whether this process can be continued", he added.

Dressed in full military regalia, Hassanal said the changes were necessary to "strengthen the institution of the monarchy and to enhance the effectiveness of the government and the people". He did not elaborate.

The country's 1959 constitution, introduced under British rule, provides for a multi-party parliamentary system. But, after a landslide election victory by a left-of-centre party in 1962 and an abortive military revolt, the legislature was dissolved and emergency rule introduced, effectively suspending the constitution.

An appointed legislative council served as the nation's de facto Par-



Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah at the opening of the Brunei Legislative Council on Saturday.

liament until 1984, when Britain granted Brunei independence and the Sultan abolished the council to assume absolute rule. Emergency rule remains in effect.

Hassanal said that, in July, he would reconvene the state council to "widen the opportunities of the public to engage and contribute to national progress".

The council is dominated by royal family members and loyalists. Brunei's citizens are reluctant to criticize the sultan and his family, which control all key government positions and the nation's media.

World calls India, says Singapore Minister

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, JULY 9. "As India calls the world, ... the world calls India." This is how a Singapore Minister today added a new and positive nuance to the strategic theme of an "India business summit" here.

The theme of the two-day summit, being organised by the Singapore Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SICCI), in association with the Mumbai-based Indian Merchants' Chamber (IMC), is "India Calling 2004."

At the inaugural session, the Singapore Minister of State for Trade and Industry and Foreign Affairs, Raymond Lim, expressed confidence that the City State would continue to play a useful role "as India calls the world, and the world calls India." The conference is being held for the first time outside India in the IMC's "India Calling" series, in the name and style of "Asia Pacific business summit." Mr. Lim noted that India was

now "reaching out beyond the Indian diaspora."

A "global business leaders' colloquium" was held as part of the inaugural ceremony after the SICCI chairman, M. Rajaram, and the IMC president, Nanik Rupani, besides India's Acting High Commissioner to Singapore, Ravi Bangar, set the tone. Speakers turned the spotlight on not only the ways in which India was now engaging the international investors but also its strategies in comparison with those of China.

Optimism was expressed by some participants that the proposed Singapore-India comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA) would be clinched, even if there be a "slight delay" due to the logistical compulsions of the new Government in India. Singapore's status as "a hub to raise capital" was also emphasised.

Making a comparative study of the "India and China models" of attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), an economist,

Joseph Tan, said a "bipolar Asia" was now "emerging" in the business sphere as a result of the economic strategies of these two countries. A point made was that "what China is to manufacturing, India is to services." This ensured that the "two poles are not really competing head-on." The China-India competitiveness was put in a different perspective at another session on IT and telecommunications. India and China, in that order, were cited as the main architects of the Silicon Valley.

While Rajesh Kapadia, partner, G.M. Kapadia & Company, chaired the business session on "asset management and insurance," Vijay Iyengar, Managing Director, Agropcorp, piloted the discussions on "manufacturing and trading" in the "agro and food-processing" sectors. Noel Hon Chia Chun, chairman, NEC Singapore, presided over the session on IT, while N. Varaprasad, deputy president, National University of Singapore, chaired the session on "education."

Singapore backs PM in war against terror

New Delhi
10 JULY

SHARING concerns over threats from terrorism and extremist violence to open and democratic societies, India and Singapore on Saturday called for effective international cooperation to combat this menace and deny sanctuaries to terrorist outfits. As a step in this direction, the two sides welcomed institutionalisation of the bilateral joint working group on intelligence cooperation on combating terrorism and transnational organised crime.

A joint statement issued after official level talks between Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his visiting Singaporean counterpart Goh Chok Tong said the two sides hoped the mutual legal assistance treaty on criminal matters firmed up by them would come into effect shortly and further enhance bilateral cooperation in the area of law enforcement.

Mr Goh, who is on a four-day visit, called on President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and vice-president Bhairon Singh Shekhawat besides having meetings with Congress president Sonia Gandhi, external affairs minister K. Natwar Singh, commerce and industry minister Kamal Nath and leader of Opposi-

tion L. K. Advani. On Saturday morning he also had a meeting with former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The visiting dignitary was on Friday conferred the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for international understanding by President Kalam.

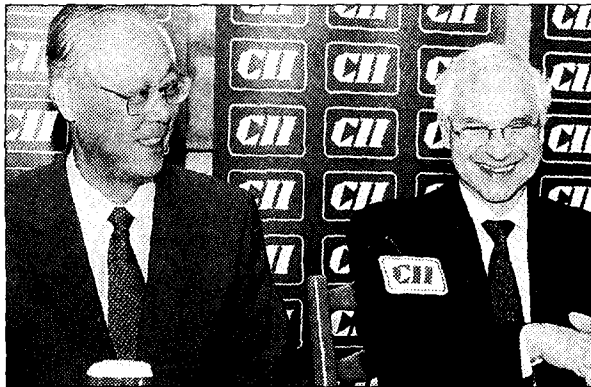
Mr Goh paid glowing tributes to Pandit Nehru, whom he described as an inspiration to the generation that had fought to free themselves from colonial rule. Both sides agreed that their strategic and economic interests were convergent. On its part, India expressed appreciation for Singapore's very positive role in enhancing New Delhi's interaction

with the Asean. They expressed "great satisfaction" at the strengthening and diversification of bilateral relations and resolved to take them to even "greater heights" in a variety of areas, the statement said.

Mr Goh and Dr Singh reviewed the progress of negotiations for the conclusion of a comprehensive

economic cooperation agreement. Both sides attached importance to this accord while recognising its potential for further cementing their growing economic and commercial ties. They commended the progress so far and directed their officials to work purposefully towards concluding the negotiations early, the statement said.

— PTI



GOH MAN GO: Singaporean PM Goh Chok Tong (L) talks with Godrej & Boyce MD Jamshyd N. Godrej during the launch of the Singapore-India partnership foundation in New Delhi on Saturday. — AFP

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Singapore-India Partnership Foundation raises Rs. 1 crore

By Amit Baruah

NEW DELHI, JULY 10. It finally became a round figure. Seventy-five lakh rupees were pledged by three leading Indian industrialists as the Singapore Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, launched the Singapore-India Partnership Foundation.

Mr. Goh, a long time friend of India, set the trend on Saturday by announcing that the Rs. 25 lakhs prize money that came along with the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding, would go to the Foundation.

The Foundation, launched at a function hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) at the Taj Mahal Hotel today, had leading lights of Indian industry rubbing shoulders with Mr. Goh.

In his introductory remarks,

the CII President, Sunil Kant Munjal, announced that Sunil Mittal, Chairman of Bharti Enterprises, had already pledged to match the contribution of Rs. 25 lakhs announced by Mr. Goh.

During his comments, the Singapore Prime Minister was keen to stress that while planning to set up the Foundation he was looking for partnership, not funds. But this didn't dampen the spirits of those who spoke after Mr. Goh.

Jamshyd Godrej, co-chairman of the new Foundation, said he too would donate Rs. 25 lakhs, as would Mr. Sunil Kant Munjal, chief of Hero Honda and at present CII President.

A cool Rs. 75 lakhs was collected by the Foundation in an hour's time — taking the total seed money to the round figure of Rs. 1 crore.

In his remarks, the Prime Minister said the Foundation would be co-chaired by both Indians and Singaporeans — it would be a balanced joint venture. "I move in small steps," Mr. Goh said.

Apart from funding the exchange of scholars, the Foundation would like to bring bright Indian students to Singapore, the Prime Minister told the gathering. It would also encourage Singaporeans to do a tour of India.

Pointing out that the Foundation should have a larger fund in the years ahead, Mr. Goh also announced that a South Asia Institute was being set up in Singapore.

A note on the Foundation said the initial funds' target had been pegged at Rs. 3 crores to be raised from the private sector in India and Singapore.

Mr. Jamshyd Godrej and Satpal Khattar, Trustee, Singapore Business Foundation, would lead the fund-raising effort.

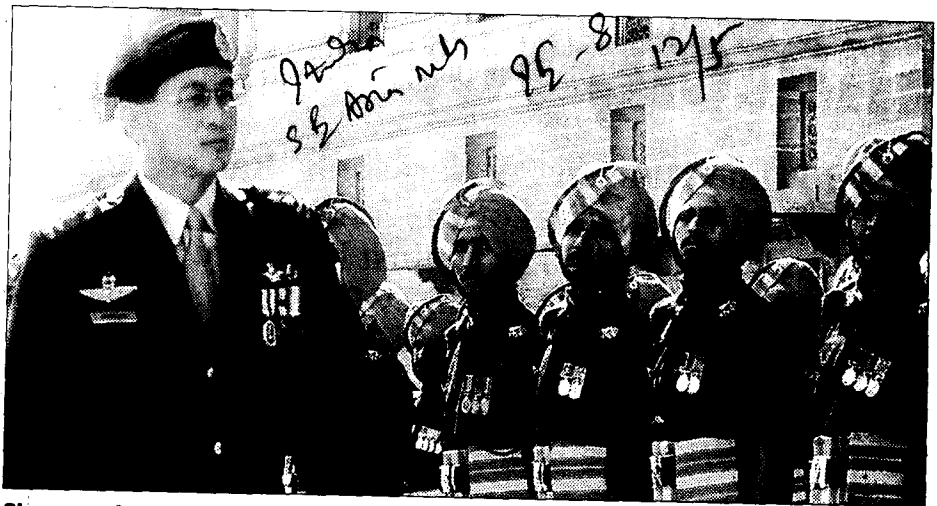
Singapore exercise cleared

■ Asked India to allow forces to hold exercises last month

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, MAY 11**

INDIA has given the go-ahead to Singapore's armed forces to conduct military exercises on its soil, according to the city-state's Army Chief Maj Gen Desmond Kulk. "We hope to come and do some training in India in near future," he told newsmen after meeting his Indian counterpart Gen N.C. Vij.

Singapore had last month approached India to allow its space to conduct live Army and Air force exercises to overcome the paucity of land



Singapore Army Chief Major General Desmond Kulk at South Block on Tuesday. PTI

to carry out such exercises on its own soil.

It appears that the Ministry of Defence has now allowed the Singapore Armed Forces to carry out such exercises in its Army's armoured corp and IAF firing range. Defence experts say such exercises would

be immensely beneficial to India as the Singapore's armed forces, particularly its Air Force, is equipped with American F-16C fighting falcons and its special forces with latest US light arms.

Gen Kulk is on a three-day visit here which follows the

visit of the country's Defence Minister last month to India. The visiting Army Chief was presented a ceremonial guard of honour at the South block.

He will meet other services chiefs and also hold talks with top ministry of Defence officials.

Thailand badly affected too

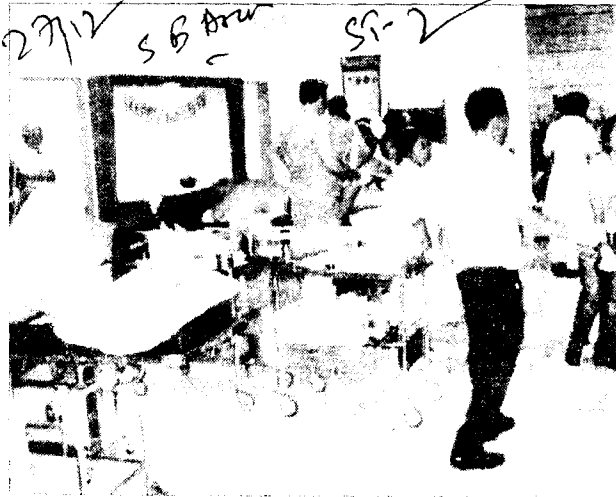
The Nation/ANN & AP

PHUKET, Dec. 26. — The death toll in today's earthquake and tsunami claimed 300 lives in Thailand, including a number of Western holiday-makers, and left 3,600 injured, a government disaster centre said.

The Narenlora Center of the public health ministry reported that people had been swept into the sea by the tidal waves while others were stranded in boats. Thousands on Phuket Island were evacuated to higher ground.

Mr. Narmethai Sribanraang, a Center official, gave the latest death toll as 289 killed, with 3,675 injured and thousands still missing.

The Center has not issued the exact number of foreigners among the victims, but according to media reports and the Thai foreign ministry, the missing, injured or dead include nationals of South Korea, Japan, Germany, South Africa, Hong Kong,



The injured being treated at a Thai hospital — The Nation/ANN

Iran, Denmark, Australia, Malaysia, Mexico, Russia, Sweden and the United States.

Five to 10-m (16 to 33 feet) high waves crashed onto beaches and roadways in Thailand following an 8.9-magnitude earthquake in Indonesia, hitting Asia's most popular resorts during the peak tourist season of the year.

The victims were in Trang, Songkhla, Phuket, Krabi, Ranong, Phang-Nga, Samui and Surat

Thani provinces, which draw thousands of visitors each year because of their world-famous beaches. Ironically, the disaster struck at the height of the tourist season.

Another wave hit Phuket's Patong Beach late tonight, washing over the beachside road and sparking an evacuation of the remaining tourists and residents in the island's densest area and night-life centre. No casualties were reported.

27 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

When terror struck Thai beaches

PHUKET (THAILAND), DEC. 26. Thousands of tourists were lazing on Thailand's renowned white sand beaches Sunday morning when an earthquake-driven tidal wave turned their tropical vacations into a holiday of terror, sweeping people, bungalows, boats and cars out to sea.

At least 168 people were killed and more than 1,900 injured by the rushing water, which struck at the peak of the tourist season when holidaymakers — especially from Europe — come to this Southeast Asian country to escape frigid winters.

The toll might have been even higher, but the beaches were relatively un-crowded when the 5-10 metre (16-33 foot) waves struck around breakfast time. Many visitors were still sleeping off Christmas festivities when they heard shouting and screaming.

"Initially we just heard a bang, a really loud bang," said Gerrard Donnelly of Britain, a guest at Phuket island's Holiday Inn. "Then Emily, my wife, went out onto the balcony and people were just running.

"We initially thought it was a terrorist attack, then the wave came and we just kept running upstairs to get on as high ground as we could," he told Britain's Sky News.

"Suddenly this huge wave came, rushing down the beach, destroying everything in its wake," said Simon Clark, 29, a photographer from London, vacationing on the Ngai island with his girlfriend, Caroline Barton, 25, also of London. "People who were snorkelling were dragged along the coral and washed up on the beach, and those who were sunbathing got washed into the sea," Mr. Clark said.

Tourists stranded

In Thailand, probably Asia's most popular holiday destination at this time of year, tourists desperate to leave the stricken islands were stranded by rough seas on well-known resort islands such as Phi Phi and Phuket.

The waves swept people trying to flee to higher ground off their motorbikes, and pushed cars down the streets like toys, witnesses said. But after the initial shock, there was little to do except observe the aftermath of nature's force.

In the Andaman Sea on Phi Phi island 200 bungalows at two resorts were swept out to sea, along with some of their staff and customers.

No exact figures

"I am afraid that there will be a high figure of foreigners missing in the sea and also my staff," said Chan Marongtaechar, owner of the PP Princess Resort and PP Charlie Beach Resort.

Mr. Chan, who was in Bangkok, didn't have exact figures of missing or dead but estimated that 700 people would normally have been on the beach. Staff told him that they were "very scared, they want to leave the island," but that the seas were too rough.

On Phuket, Somboon Wangaitham, deputy director of the Wachira Hospital, said one of the worst-hit areas was the populous Patong beach, where at least 32 people died and 500 were injured.

Ian Proud, British embassy spokesman, said he was travelling to Phuket to assess the situation and help tourists, though he didn't have any reports of British deaths or injuries. More than 700,000 Britons visit this country each year.

"The numbers will be high of British tourists who go to Phuket at this time of the year," Mr. Proud said.

'Lots of people missing'

The U.S. Embassy in Bangkok did not have an estimate for the number of American tourists in Thailand, or for those killed or injured Sunday. "That's something the embassy is trying to track, but lots and lots of people are missing. — AP

Fresh Thai violence targets govt

The Nation/ANN & AP

BANGKOK, Dec. 6. — A massive airdrop of paper birds yesterday to promote peace failed to halt violence in Thailand's restive south, with a spate of new attacks targeting soldiers and local officials today.

The bombings, shootings and arson attacks came hours after Prime Minister Mr Thaksin Shinawatra said that yesterday's airdrop of nearly 100 million Japanese-style origami paper cranes over the predominantly Muslim region had achieved "an enormous, positive psychological effect" towards peace.

A 7 kg bomb was detonated remotely by a mobile phone at a rest-stop for patrolling soldiers this morning in Ra-ngae district. Former Pattani chief prosecutor Nat Wipaset (62) was shot dead. Police defused a 10 kg plastic explosive planted in a market in Narathiwat's Tak Bai district. The bomb was made from Power Gel, an explosive used in mining-construction that can be detonated with a mobile phone.

In a related development, a senior education official said that teachers who graduated from schools in Muslim countries and teach at *pondoks* or other private Islamic schools will receive official certification. He said the education ministry has instructed his commission to grant certificates to the teachers.

07 DEC 2004

THE STATESMAN

String of rebel attacks in southern Thailand

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THE NATION/ANN SB

BANGKOK, Nov. 13. — Three blasts in Muslim-dominated southern Thailand injured at least 16 people today. Militants also stole an arms cache from security volunteers and a Buddhist martial arts teacher was shot dead in broad daylight. Most of the attacks occurred in Narathiwat province.

A powerful bomb exploded at about 6 p.m. at Angmor Restaurant in Narathiwat's Muang (city) district, damaging the restaurant and shattering glass as far as 30 metres across the street. At least 16 people were seriously injured. Police said a person posing as a customer left a bag laden with explosives in the restaurant and detonated it by a mobile phone after leaving. The restaurant is a favourite with ethnic Thais and Chinese in the province.

An hour later, another bomb went off at a shop in Tak Bai. There were no reports of casualties. Another bomb went off at a military checkpoint at 8 p.m. in the province's Bacho district but no one was injured.

Assailants raided villages in Narathiwat's Chanae, Bacho, Sukhirin and Rangae districts, stealing at least nine shotguns from village defence volunteers. A villager and two soldiers were injured during the attacks in Chanae district.

Yesterday's violence in Narathiwat was most likely the biggest coordinated attack after the uprising on 28 April, when 106 Islamic militants were killed after a pre-dawn assault against security posts in Pattani, Yala and Songkhla.

In another incident, Hiran Khongchareon (45), a Buddhist martial-arts teacher, died after he was shot in the head in Pattani's Yarang district.

Mosque on fire in Dutch village

THE HAGUE, Nov. 13. — A mosque in the southeastern Dutch village of Helden, near the German border, was on fire early today, police said. Firefighters battled the blaze. It was not immediately clear if it had been set by arsonists.

The fire broke out at around 10:30 a.m. (IST). A local broadcaster reported that the building was largely destroyed. There have been more than 20 incidents of fires or vandalism on Muslim buildings — and a handful of retaliatory attacks on Christian churches — since the 2 November killing of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a suspected Muslim radical. Van Gogh, a distant relative of the famous painter, made the film *Submission*, which is highly critical of the treatment of women under Islam. He was shot and stabbed to death while cycling on an Amsterdam street. A note pinned to his chest with a knife threatened further attacks on several Dutch politicians in the name of militant Islam. — AP

Prime Minister Mr Thaksin Shinawatra, meanwhile, urged the region's governors to meet with members of Parliament, religious leaders and local residents in an effort to halt the violence.

"Some people, no matter what, they just won't stop (the violence)," he said adding, "We have to pursue two ways or paths: negotiate and maintain the peace and protect the innocent from harm," adds AP.

Thai PM defiant over 'holocaust'

Agencies

Pattani (Thailand), Oct 27

THAI PRIME Minister Thaksin Shinawatra shed few tears on Wednesday over the death of 78 Muslims in military custody as distraught mourners besieged an army base in the far south, demanding the bodies of relatives.

Despite an expression of regret before parliament, Thaksin was defiant in the face of criticism of his attitude to human rights. Seventy-eight protesters were suffocated, as they were crammed into overcrowded trucks and taken to military custody in Monday's tragedy.

"It was an accident during transport which happened because the time and

situation was pressing.

There were few vehicles available, that was why they were crammed together, which made it a bit rough," Thaksin told reporters.

The army had less access to transport than usual because Monday was a public holiday, he said. He also suggested that some of the victims died because they were weakened by fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Amid fears of a backlash in the restive, mainly Muslim region, around 300 sobbing relatives poured over lists of victims outside the military barracks in Pattani.

"I came to pick up my dead nephew. I am sad for what has happened. I never thought this would happen," said a 58-year-old Narathiwat village chief.

Soldiers used loudspeakers to calm the crowd, telling them the 1,200 plus detainees still in the camp were "alive and being treated well."

More than 440 people have been killed in 10 months of violence that looks increasingly like a Muslim separatist insurgency in Thailand's three southernmost provinces.

Thaksin, who has adopted a hardline stance to the southern unrest, said security forces used "gentle measures" to quell the protest outside a police station, which ended when troops and police fired live ammunition, tear gas and water cannon. Six men were killed at the scene of the protest,

called to demand the release of six Muslim villagers accused of giving government-issue shotguns to militants. Another man died in hospital on Tuesday night, bringing the death toll to 85.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's largest Islamic opposition party denounced the Thai government for Wednesday's tragedy. Hatta Ramli, a senior official with the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, said those killed were victims of "a holocaust that the Thai government is responsible for." They even said the killings amounted to "state terrorism."

The 800,000-member Islamic party holds power in Kelantan, bordering Thailand's Muslim dominated southern provinces.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES 28 OCT 2004

80 prisoners choke to death in Thai trucks

*S. B. Khan
-Thon (law)*

Pattani (Thailand), Oct. 26 (Reuters): Almost 80 people died in military custody in southern Thailand, suffocated while being transported in trucks to army barracks after a violent demonstration by Muslims, officials said today.

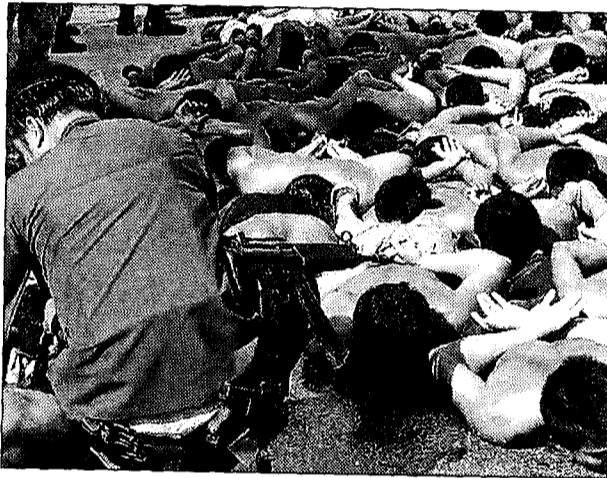
Only six people were previously believed to have been killed when police opened fire to quell rioting yesterday in the Muslim-majority region.

The huge leap in the toll, and the manner of the deaths, are bound to add to tensions and highlight the harsh methods security forces are using to quell a 10-month-old rebellion against Bangkok's rule over the region.

The gruesome incident carries echoes of the Wagon Tragedy of 1921 in India. On November 10, 1921, 71 Muslim (Mappila) prisoners were packed in a closed railway goods wagon and taken to jails in Coimbatore. Sixty one prisoners died of suffocation.

Justice ministry official Manit Sutaporn said 78 people died of suffocation, making it the bloodiest day in the region since April 28, when troops and police shot dead 106 machete-wielding militants.

"We found no wounds on their bodies," Manit told a news conference in Pattani, a provincial capital 1,100 km south of Bangkok. He said the victi-



Thai soldiers arrest rioters outside the Tak Bai police station in Thailand's Narathiwat province. (Reuters)

ms were among hundreds of Muslim men arrested after a 1,500-strong rally was dispersed from outside a police station in Narathiwat province.

The deaths appear to have occurred while the detainees, who were stripped semi-naked

after their arrest, were being taken by truck to a barracks in Pattani, a five-hour journey, Major-General Sinchai Nutsatit told the news conference.

Army spokesman Akom Pongprom confirmed the toll and cause of death as suffoca-

tion. He said the bodies were being kept at the barracks.

Troops and police fired live rounds, as well as water cannon and tear gas, during a six-hour standoff with the crowd, which was demanding the release of six villagers accused of handing over government-issue shotguns to militants.

Shots were also fired from the crowd, officials said, adding that some of the protesters were under the influence of drugs or were frail because of fasting during Ramadan.

Six protesters were killed at the scene of the violence, and 20 people injured.

"This is typical," Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said when asked about reports of scores dead. "It's about bodies made weak from fasting. Nobody hurt them."

Security officials justified the use of force in yesterday's clashes, saying they feared the police compound would be attacked.

Drugged dance of death

S. G. Anon Thailand
Pattani, Thailand, April 28 (Reuters): Troops and police killed more than 100 gun and machete-wielding Muslim militants on Wednesday, including more than 30 in a three-hour mosque shootout, on a day of carnage in Thailand's restive south.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra said 107 "bandits" and five soldiers had died in the fighting, which started when gangs of mainly young men — some wearing Islamic slogans — launched dawn attacks on army and police posts across the predominantly Muslim region.

Their motive remains a mystery. "Judging from their dead bodies, they had taken narcotics. Their smell suggested the use of drug-laced cough drops," deputy Prime Minister Chavalit Yongchaiyudh said.

Army chief General Chaiyasidh Shinawatra said intelligence services had been tipped off about the attacks, meaning security forces were ready and waiting for trouble.

Many of those involved in the assaults, which mark a major escalation in four months of

violence in Thailand's three southernmost provinces, were wearing black or dark green uniforms with bright red headbands.

Thaksin vowed to smash what he said were rings of troublemakers motivated purely by crime, rather than by religion or ideology, in a region that saw a low-key Muslim separatist rebellion in the 1970s and 1980s.

But the widespread and coordinated nature of the attacks on about 15 security installations across the provinces bordering Malaysia suggested that forces other than pure gangsterism or drugs were at work, analysts said.

"Those who died must have believed they were dying for their religion," said Ahmad Somboon Bualang of Pattani's University of Prince Songkhla. "They must have had an ideology beyond separatism, otherwise why would they attack with their bare hands and swords?"

Television showed a sandbagged police post ablaze after one of the attacks. Burning motorcycles were scattered in and

See 29/4
around the compound and the corpses of two rebels lay in the entrance hallway.

One wore a Muslim prayer cap, and both had red scarves tied around their heads and waists.

Another wore a green T-shirt emblazoned with Arabic writing and the letters "JI" — a possible reference to Jemaah Islamiah, the group linked to Osama bin Laden's al Qaida network and blamed for terror attacks across Southeast Asia.

Thailand's three southernmost provinces have been hit by a wave of shootings, bombings and arson attacks that had already claimed more than 60 lives since a January 4 raid on an army barracks that left four soldiers dead.

Despite a huge military clampdown in the south, the violence has shown few signs of abating, leading analysts to fear that the region's disaffected Muslim youth might become a fertile breeding ground for the likes of Jemaah Islamiah or al Qaida.

■ See Page 4