

News Digest

By The Associated Press

Supreme Court says death penalty valid despite racial bias

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that state death penalty laws can be valid even if statistics indicate they are carried out in racially biased ways.

In its most important ruling on capital punishment since 1976, the court split 5-4 in upholding Georgia's death penalty system even though killers of white people in that state are far more likely to be condemned to death than those who kill blacks.

The ruling dashed what many death penalty opponents considered to be their best chance of saving hundreds of the nearly 1,900 men and women on death rows nationwide.

The decision removed the last legal claim many of those inmates had raised in fighting for their lives, but it is not expected to dramatically quicken the

pace of executions. Since the Supreme Court reinstated capital punishment in 1976, 70 U.S.

'The court is saying there may be racial discrimination in choosing who lives and who dies but it doesn't care!'

— Waxman

prison inmates have been executed by electrocution, poison gas, firing squad and lethal injection. "The court is saying there may be

racial discrimination in choosing who lives and who dies but it doesn't care," Seth Waxman, a lawyer for the Congressional Black Caucus, said of Wednesday's ruling.

David Whitmore, a lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union in New Orleans, said the decision removed the last hope of a nearly a dozen of Louisiana's 47 death row inmates.

Illinois prosecutor Mark Rotert called the ruling "very, very good news."

"It was one of the last, best chances to get a broad-based attack on death penalty litigation nationwide," Rotert said.

Justice Lewis F. Powell, writing for the court, said a statistical study of Georgia's death penalty system "at most indicates a discrepancy that appears to correlate with race."



But he said the discrepancy does not violate the Constitution's equal-protection guarantees.

But Powell said death-sentencing decisions made by judges or juries are based on too many varying factors to let discriminatory intent be proved by statistics.

Nationwide, about 95 percent of death row inmates killed whites even though blacks are more often the vic-

tims of murder in this country. "The Baldus study does not demonstrate a constitutionally significant risk of racial bias affecting the Georgia capital-sentencing process," Powell wrote.

He said McCleskey would have to prove "that the decision-makers in his case acted with discriminatory purpose."

But lawyers active in fighting death penalty laws said proving discrimination in individual cases is an impossible task.

Powell was joined by Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Byron R. White, Sandra Day O'Connor and Antonin Scalia.

Joining Brennan in dissent were Justices Thurgood Marshall, Harry A. Blackmun and John Paul Stevens.

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Iran sentences American to 10 years for CIA spying

NICOSIA, Cyprus — Iran has sentenced an American engineer to 10 years in prison on charges of spying for the CIA, the official Iranian news agency reported Wednesday.

The Islamic Republic News Agency, monitored in Nicosia, quoted "informed sources" for its report on the sentencing of Jon Pattis, a 50-year-old telecommunications specialist. It did not say when the trial occurred.

Pattis, employed by Cosmos Engineers of Bethesda, Md., worked at the Asadabad telecommunications center 200 miles southwest of Tehran. He was arrested last June, shortly after an Iraqi air raid on the center that interrupted Iran's communications with the outside world.

According to the news agency, he faced seven charges related to espionage and using a forged passport to enter the country.

In an appearance on Iranian state



television in October, the American engineer said he passed information through his company to the CIA on Iranian military activities, oil production, inflation and food distribution.

He said he gave information about the Asadabad complex and the warning system it uses to guard against Iraqi air raids.

In Brief

Girl holds class at gunpoint, gives up

PHOENIX, Ariz. — A eighth-grade girl held a teacher and 13 students at gunpoint in a junior high school classroom for about an hour Wednesday before she gave up, authorities said.

There was no report of injury during the incident at Cholla Junior High, police said.

"We don't know what spurred it or what she wants," police Sgt. Brad Thiss said shortly before the girl surrendered.

John Durvin, an assistant superintendent, said that "one of the students has a large-caliber handgun in one of the classrooms."

Official: AIDS in Mexico could rise by 1991

MEXICO CITY — Mexico's number of AIDS patients, now 407, could top 32,000 within four years unless the public is educated to prevent the spread of the deadly disease, federal health officials said Tuesday.

The warning came at a press conference where federal Health Secretary Guillermo Soperon said the time has come for frank talk about "safe sex" — talk he acknowledged could offend some people in this traditionally conservative country.

"We have a great opportunity to reduce the possibilities" of seeing AIDS spread from the traditional high-risk groups to the general population, said Soperon, flanked by members of a new National Committee on AIDS Research and Control.

Work at the Daily Nebraskan

The Daily Nebraskan is currently accepting applications for the following fall positions:

- ★ News Reporters
- ★ Sports Reporters
- ★ Arts & Entertainment Reporters
- ★ Copy Editors
- ★ Artists
- ★ Photographers

Applications are available at the Daily Nebraskan, Rm. 34 Nebraska Union. Applications must be returned by 4:30 p.m. on Friday, April 24. All applicants must be UNL students.

Daily Nebraskan

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Death toll rises in civil war

More than 100 die in Sri Lanka air raids

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — Government planes bombed Tamil rebels and the guerrillas attacked soldiers Wednesday, adding more than 100 dead to a toll that has reached nearly 400 in six days of civil war.

The attacks by both sides came a day after a car bomb tore Colombo's main bus station apart, killing at least 106 people and wounding 295.

The government said 80 Tamil rebels were killed in an air raid. A military source reported at least 36 soldiers and police slain in guerrilla raids and said eight rebels were killed.

Government and military figures put

the death toll since Friday at 374 on this island off India's tip, where Tamil extremists have fought the Sinhalese majority for a "separate nation" since 1983.

Tamil terrorists stopped vehicles in eastern Sri Lanka last Friday, pulled passengers out and opened fire, killing 127 people, most of them Sinhalese.

On Monday, Tamil guerillas killed 15 Sinhalese at a village in the same region.

Friday's attack abruptly ended a government cease-fire aimed at renewing peace talks in the conflict, which has cost more than 5,500 lives since

Tamils began fighting for an independent state in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.

Unofficial sources said the number of deaths since Friday could surpass 500 when final tolls from the bus terminal bombing and air raid are known.

A Health Ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the count from the car bomb might reach 200. Tamil sources said an equal number of people may have been killed in the air raid and shelling Wednesday on the Tamil-dominated Jaffna Peninsula in the north.

The government warned residents of the area to stay away from obvious targets of military action.

Tilak Ratnakara, head of the government's Media Center, said: "We will continue to strike at militant targets until the civilian killings are stopped and peace negotiations resume."

The government said its retaliatory air strike was aimed at outposts of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students, which it blamed for the bus station bombing. Both issued denials from their exile headquarters in southern India.

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