

# Two men released in sniper investigation

**Ron Hutcheson, Ben Finley and Sumana Chatterjee**  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

ROCKVILLE, Md. — A possible suspect in the Washington-area sniper killings called police Monday, but authorities said the conversation was garbled and they urged the person to call back.

Police Chief Charles Moose of Montgomery County, Md., announced the tantalizing lead hours after Virginia police took two men into custody in what turned out to be another investigative dead end. The men, alleged to be illegal immigrants from Guatemala and Mexico, later were turned over to immigration authorities for deportation proceedings.

In another development Monday, ballistics experts confirmed Saturday's shooting in Ashland, Va., was the sniper's work. They reached their conclusion after examining a bullet that was removed from the victim, a 37-year-old man who was

listed in critical but stable condition at Richmond's Medical College of Virginia Hospitals.

The telephone call raised hopes of a break in a case that has baffled investigators and terrorized an area stretching from Washington's northern suburbs to Richmond, Va., about 100 miles to the south. Police think the caller is the shooter. But Moose, who is directing a sniper task force, said the call was garbled. Speaking to the caller through the news media, he urged the person to contact police again.

"The person you called did not hear everything that you said," Moose said, reading from a prepared statement. "The audio was unclear, and we want to get it right. Call us back so that we can clearly understand."

Moose repeated the statement word-for-word at the end of his brief news conference.

Tight-lipped police declined to provide any details of the caller's

message or the circumstances that led to the communication.

The day began dramatically, as police SWAT teams outside Richmond surrounded a white Plymouth Voyager van that had stopped beside an Exxon station's pay phone. Police yanked two men from the vehicle, handcuffed them, questioned them throughout the day and concluded they were uninvolved in the case. They'd walked into a staked-out site, said one federal official, who asked not to be identified, and were merely "at the wrong place at the wrong time."

The two men, an unnamed 24-year-old Mexican national and 35-year-old Guatemalan immigrant, were turned over to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The wife of the latest shooting victim — her identity and her husband's protected by hospital authorities — issued a statement through the hospital Monday urging prayers for her husband and his attacker.

"This has been a frightening and difficult time, where I have feared for the loss of my husband, friend and soul mate," she said. "The hospital has taken care of all of our needs, so there is no need to send anything other than continued prayer. Please pray also for the attacker and that no one else is hurt."

Doctors said the victim, a 6-foot, 200-pound man, faces a grueling ordeal of three to four more operations, possibly interspersed with internal infections and other life-threatening complications. The sniper's bullet entered the left side of the man's abdomen and tore through his stomach, his pancreas, a kidney and his spleen before lodging in his chest.

"He's lucky to be alive," said surgeon Rao Ivatury. "We anticipate lots of complications. ... The next two weeks will be crucial."

Ivatury said the bullet seemed to explode in the man's stomach, ripping the organ apart. Doctors had to remove his spleen, half of his pan-

creas and about two-thirds of his stomach. They also recovered most of the bullet.

Police efforts to communicate with the sniper began with the discovery of a message at Saturday's shooting site, outside a Ponderosa restaurant in Ashland, near Richmond. Moose revealed the message at a news conference Sunday night and said it included a telephone number.

"You gave us a telephone number," he said, addressing his comments to person who left the message. "We do want to talk to you. Call us at the number you provided."

By dictating a phone number of his choosing, the person who left the message could have been trying to get police to establish a dedicated line for his calls.

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## High court will not hear appeal about juvenile execution

**Shannon McCaffrey**  
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WASHINGTON — A sharply divided Supreme Court refused Monday to consider abolishing the execution of juvenile killers. By a 5-4 margin the court declined to hear the appeal of a Kentucky man who has been sentenced to die for abducting, sodomizing and killing a gas station attendant when he was 17.

Last term, the high court banned the death penalty for mentally retarded people, ruling it was "cruel and unusual punishment." Four of the more liberal justices said Monday that the court's review should extend to those who commit capital crimes before they are 18.

Justice John Paul Stevens on Monday called the practice of putting juvenile offenders to death "shameful." "The practice of executing such offenders is a relic of the past and is inconsistent with evolving standards of decency in a civilized society," he wrote in his dissent from the majority opinion.

In refusing to hear the appeal, the

majority offered no comment.

Justices David Souter, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer joined Stevens in his dissent.

Stevens, Ginsburg and Breyer had said over the summer that they wanted the court to take up the issue of juvenile killers on death row. The case of Kevin Nigel Stanford, of Louisville, would have allowed them to do so.

Stanford, now 39, has been on death row since 1982. He was convicted of shooting a 20-year-old woman in the face and leaving her body kneeling in the back seat of her mother's Chevrolet Impala, jeans and underwear around her ankles.

Stanford's lawyer Margaret O'Donnell said that like the mentally retarded, teenagers were not as culpable as adults for crimes they committed. She cited research on brain development showing that adolescents are "less able to control their impulses and make reasoned judgments" than adults are.

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## Suicide bombing in Israel kills at least 14, wounds 40

**Cliff Churgin and Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson**  
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

HADERA, Israel — A suicide car bombing destroyed a bus at the Karkur Junction on Monday, about five miles from Hadera in northern Israel, killing at least 14 passengers and wounding more than 40 people. Two bombers also died.

The militant Islamic Jihad movement claimed responsibility for the attack, which the Palestinian Authority condemned.

The bombing was the most deadly suicide attack since early August. A smaller attack a month ago prompted Israel to surround and destroy much of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's headquarters. That military action was sharply criticized by the Bush administration, which is worried about the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on its ability to build a coalition against Iraq. It was unclear how Israel would respond this time.

White House spokesman Ari Fleischer condemned Monday's bombing.

Bus 841 was on its way from Kiryat Shemona to Tel Aviv when it

stopped at the Karkur Junction at 4:23 p.m. A passenger got on and spoke to driver Chaim Avraham, but before he could answer, a Kia Jeep loaded with an estimated 175 pounds of explosives rammed the back of the bus, causing an explosion.

Lightly wounded passengers, bystanders and soldiers from a nearby base began to evacuate the wounded, but the bus quickly caught fire. The fire's heat caused ammunition that soldiers on the bus were carrying to explode and prevented rescue workers from boarding the bus for 30 minutes.

Hadera is about halfway between Tel Aviv and Haifa. The area around the coastal city has seen many Palestinian bombings, with terrorists crossing over from the northern West Bank, less than a half-hour's drive away. Police think the explosives-laden car came from the West Bank city of Jenin.

The attack came two days before Assistant Secretary of State William Burns was due to visit Israel as part of a tour of Middle East nations.

Israel recently has attacked the

Gaza Strip repeatedly, targeting Palestinian militants. Bystanders, including children, have been killed and wounded. The Bush administration has urged Israel to be more cautious.

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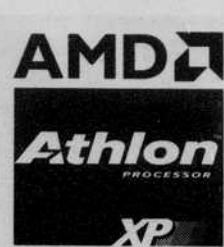
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