



Relatives pray at a memorial service for the victims of the February 18 arson attack in Daegu. The death toll in the blaze caused by an arson attack rose to 125, with 138 injured and some 314 still reported missing, city officials said.

Angry relatives confront president-elect at disaster scene

AFP, Daegu

Angry relatives of victims of a subway arson attack confronted South Korean president-elect Roh Moo-Hyun yesterday as he visited the scene in Daegu city where 126 people died.

Roh, 56, who takes office Tuesday, visited the central subway station where two trains were gutted by fire two days ago and toured hospitals to comfort some of the 131 people receiving treatment for injuries.

He also paid his respects and delivered a wreath to a makeshift altar to the dead set up in a government building turned into a temporary emergency headquarters and reception centre for victims' families.

As Roh attempted to leave the room where the altar had been erected, four women and a man blocked the door and refused to let him pass for several minutes before stunned security officials and police escorted them away.

"I have no body, please find it for me," screamed one woman in her 50s at Roh, as other family members joined the shouting match and tugged at his clothing.

Only a few dozen of the victims have been identified and forensic scientists say they will need DNA testing to identify many others who were burned beyond recognition, a process that could take months, rather than weeks.

On Wednesday, some 200 relatives searching for clues about their lost loved-ones scuffled with police and city officials. Prime Minister Kim Suk-Soo was mobbed by an unruly crowd during a visit on the same day.

President Kim Dae-Jung declared South Korea's fourth largest city some 200 kilometres (120 miles) south east of Seoul a disaster area, promising financial aid and Roh said he would see to it that the support was forthcoming.

"I express deep condolences over your pain and suffering," Roh said after a 30-minute meeting with a delegation of bereaved relatives. "The government will give as much support as possible to ease your pain."

Roh also addressed reports that more lives were lost in the disaster because of a lack of fire precautions and safety measures as well as other human errors. "We will take safety measure by every means

possible to ensure that this tragedy will not happen again," he said.

Police probing what went wrong were questioning subway controllers who allowed the second train to arrive at the station several minutes after the blaze started.

"The driver had intended to pull the train to a halt at the station to help passengers escape quickly rather than stop in the subway tunnel and let them out on the tracks," one subway official said.

Most of the dead were found in the second train after the fire triggered an automatic shutdown of the power supply to the station and the doors jammed shut, trapping passengers inside.

"No one intentionally cut the power," said chief electrician at the Daegu subway system Im Yong-Dal. "There is a system sensor which activates a shutdown when it finds anything wrong," he said.

He said he presumed the fire triggered the shutdown.

The arson suspect, 56-year-old Kim Dae-Hwan, a local man with a history of mental illness, poured gasoline from a plastic bottle inside one of the carriages of a train and ignited it with a cigarette lighter, police said.

Arab summit to be held in March

AFP, Cairo

The annual Arab summit will take place in Cairo on March 1 with Bahrain presiding and be devoted to the Iraqi crisis, the Arab League said yesterday, following abortive efforts to stage an earlier meeting.

"The Arab League announces that the ordinary Arab summit will hold its 15th session on March 1 in Cairo under the chairmanship of the kingdom of Bahrain", an official statement said.

The summit had been decided "following consultations on the subject among the Arab capitals," the statement from the office of league secretary general Amr Mussa added.

Earlier Bahrain's official BNA news agency said Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Issa al-Khalifa set the date during a telephone call Wednesday night.

"It was agreed during the talks that Bahrain will call the 15th ordinary Arab summit and chair it on March 1 at the headquarters of the Arab League in Egypt," the agency said.

Pakistan Air Force chief dies in plane crash

AFP, Islamabad

The head of Pakistan's air force and his wife were among 18 people killed yesterday when an air force Fokker plane they were travelling in crashed near Pakistan's north-west border with Afghanistan.

"Air Chief Air Marshal Mushaf Ali was on board. There were 17 other people also on board. There were no survivors," military spokesman Brigadier Saulat Raza told AFP.

The dead included the plane's entire crew and two Air Vice Marshals, a military statement said.

The wreckage of the twin turbo-prop craft was found in North West Frontier Province 17 miles (27 kilometers) west of Kohat, an air force statement said.

"The cause of the crash is not yet known," the statement added.

President Pervez Musharraf expressed deep grief and sorrow over Ali's death, the state Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) reported without details.

Musharraf had appointed Ali air force chief of staff in November 2000.

The air force chief had been on

his way from Islamabad to Kohat to conduct the annual inspection of an air force base at Kohat, air force spokesman Air Commodore Sarfraz

Ahmed Khan said in a statement. "A high level board of inquiry has been constituted to determine the cause of the crash," he added.

Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri said the death of Ali was a great loss for Pakistan and its armed forces.

"We have lost one of our great sons and a fine soldier," Kasuri told reporters in the southern port city of Karachi.

Crashes by Pakistan Air Force planes "are rare," an air force official said, but was unable to offer any data.

"We report when such mishap occurs but we don't keep the data," he said, requesting not to be identified. The rate is "not more than a few" in a year, he added.

Two air force fighter planes crashed in mid-air during a training exercise on December 10 in the southwestern province of Baluchistan, but the pilots of both planes ejected and there were no casualties.



This handout file photo dated March 23, 2001 shows Pakistani military ruler General Pervez Musharraf (L) standing alongside Navel Chief Admiral Aziz Mirza (C) and Air Force Chief Air Marshal Mushaf Ali Mir (R) in Islamabad.

US pleased with first Sept 11 suspect conviction

AFP, Washington

The United States said it was pleased at the sentence handed down by a German court to a Moroccan student convicted for being an accessory to the murder of more than 3,000 people in the world's first trial over the September 11, 2001, terror attacks.

"This was an important trial, the first in connection with those attacks, and we are pleased that the defendant received the maximum sentence possible," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

"The United States believes terrorists should be brought to justice for their crimes, particularly crimes as heinous as the 9-11 terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, and rural Pennsylvania," he said in a written answer to a question posed at a State Department news briefing.

A court in Hamburg sentenced Mounir El Motassadeq, 28, to 15 years in prison on Wednesday.

In addition to the accessor to murder charges, Motassadeq was also convicted of attempted murder, grievous bodily harm and membership of a terrorist organisation for his role in what investigators called an al-Qaeda cell in the northern German port city.

It was the first ever verdict in any trial linked to the attacks by the Islamic group led by Saudi-born militant Osama bin Laden.

The presiding judge said Motassadeq had been a founding member in the late 1990s of the Hamburg cell of six extremists which included the alleged ring-leader of the group, Egyptian Mohammed Atta, and two other suicide hijackers.

Although the accused was not directly involved in carrying out the attacks, Motassadeq's job was to act as "a rear guard" for the others, to cover up their whereabouts and handle money transfers, the judge said.

Mounir El Motassadeq appeared an intelligent, devoutly religious man who throughout his four-month trial confidently avowed his innocence.

After arriving in Germany in 1993 to pursue a degree in electrical engineering, Motassadeq moved two years later to the northern port city of Hamburg where he became active at the al-Quds mosque.

It was there and at Hamburg's Technical University that Motassadeq, now 28, became close to a group of young men that included three of the future suicide hijackers who formed the core of what investigators call an al-Qaeda cell.



Plainclothes policemen escort Iqbal Kaskar (C), a younger brother of gangster Dawood Ibrahim, in Mumbai yesterday. Police arrested two men in connection with a serial bombing which killed nearly 300 people in Mumbai and identified them as top functionaries of India's most-wanted gangster, Dawood Ibrahim, who is currently believed to be in Karachi, Pakistan.

Police quiz serial blasts accused in Mumbai

AFP, Mumbai

Indian police were questioning two men, after their overnight deportation from Dubai, in connection with a serial bombing campaign that killed nearly 300 in Mumbai, officials said yesterday.

The government of Maharashtra, hailed their deportation and said the administration was considering charging the pair under a tough law that provides for the death sentence for acts of terrorism.

"This is a big achievement for India because these two were not only a problem for Mumbai but for the people of the entire nation," Maharashtra deputy Chief Minister Chaggan Bhujbal said.

Police said the two arrested men were Iqbal Sheikh Kaskar, a younger brother of Ibrahim, and the latter's aide Ezaz Pathan, who is wanted in connection with the 1993 string of blasts that killed nearly 300 people and maimed hundreds more here.

"The two were brought to Mumbai at around 11pm Wedn-

esday and are being questioned by the local as well as federal police," a senior city police official said.

The deportation and subsequent arrest of the two is expected help police better understand Dawood Ibrahim's crime network.

Dawood, India's most dreaded underworld don, fled the country before the blasts.

His brother was arrested in Dubai on Wednesday, while Pathan was detained earlier this month. Indian police had requested they be deported.

The Indian Express newspaper reported Thursday that Kaskar had asked to be deported to India as he was feeling "homesick" and was confident of release from custody on bail as offences against him were bailable.

Ibrahim is accused of planning the Mumbai blasts in retaliation for sweeping Hindu-Muslim riots that erupted in India following the December 6, 1992 razing of an ancient mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya by Hindu zealots.