

Landslide kills 32 in China

AFP, Beijing

Thirty two construction workers were killed and three were missing after a landslide buried them while they slept, local officials said Monday.

The disaster happened in southwestern Guizhou province around 2:00 am (1800 GMT) Sunday where a highway was being built.

"As of this morning we know that 32 people died, three are still missing," said an official surnamed An from the State Administration for Work Safety.

Bali bomber's trial begins

ANN, Denpasar

The first trial of a Bali bombing suspect, Amrozi, began Monday in the Indonesian resort island amid a huge security clampdown.

Amrozi, an Indonesian aged 40, faces the death penalty if convicted on four counts of terrorism. The bombing of two crowded night-spots last October 12 killed 202 people from 21 countries.

The attack is blamed on the Jemaah Islamiyah regional terror group, which is thought linked to al-Qaeda. It was the worst terror strike since al-Qaeda's September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

Pakistan will not insist on UN resolutions on Kashmir

PTI, Islamabad

While making cautious moves to normalise relations with India, Pakistan has assured the US that it would not insist on UN resolutions on Kashmir and choke cross-border infiltration by rolling back terrorist camps, a local newspaper reported on Monday.

Quoting an unnamed senior Pakistani official, The Nation said that "both goodwill gifts" were delivered through US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to the Indian leadership during his recent visit to the two countries.

The report said Pakistan and India were inching towards reaching an understanding to "freeze" the Kashmir issue, scale down military tensions and focus more on improving trade, transport and diplomatic ties.

Islamabad's approach has a tacit approval of China which was persuading Pakistani leaders to "freeze" the Kashmir issue and focus more on economic development as it did with India, the official said.

Though there was no indication yet here that Pakistan has given such far reaching commitments to Armitage, the paper quoted a senior leader of ruling pro-military Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) as saying that by conceding so much ground to India at the first stage, Islamabad actually retreated to its February 1999 position when Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif signed the Lahore Accord.

"The diplomatic disaster for Pakistan is that India has lost nothing in the process but Pakistan's stand on Jihad in Kashmir has weakened following the 9/11 terror attacks and it also lost goodwill among the Indian masses and the government created by the Lahore accord," he said.

Meanwhile, the leader of Indian Kashmiri expressed optimism Monday that Kashmiri rebels would call a ceasefire to promote the recent thaw in tension between India and Pakistan.

"While I can't force militants and their supporting organizations to announce a ceasefire in Kashmir, everybody is expecting it so that peace is genuinely given a

chance," Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed said in a statement.

"I am optimistic that this (a ceasefire) may happen one day," he said.

"This has to happen for ultimate resolution of the problem" of Kashmir, he said.

"If the ceasefire is announced, the government would respond positively," said Sayeed, whose People's Democratic Party swept from power the more hawkish National Conference in elections last year.

But on Saturday, a spokesman for the United Jihad Council, an alliance of 13 Kashmiri rebel groups, responded to Sayeed's calls by saying: "Talking about ceasefire at this stage is a premature thing."

"Ceasefire should not be a basis or condition for (the beginning of) dialogue. There are a number of examples that militancy and dialogue ran side by side in different parts of the world." Sadaqat Hussain told AFP in Pakistani Kashmir's capital Muzaffarabad.



Pakistani legislators pose in front of the Taj Mahal in Agra on Monday. Thirteen Pakistani legislators who are on a "peace and goodwill mission" to India visited the northern Indian Taj Mahal, pledging to bridge the wide gulf between the South Asian rivals.



A group of young Chinese doctors gather to form a shape of a heart with candlelight pay tribute to the nurses on Sunday in the eastern city of Hangzhou, during a ceremony to mark the International Nurses' Day on Monday. China's Premier Wen Jiabao said the country's SARS crisis remained "grim" as the government announced five more deaths from the disease Sunday and World Health Organization (WHO) experts headed to rural Guangxi province to probe the spread of SARS.

WHO experts fan out into Chinese provinces to probe SARS spread

AFP, Beijing

World Health Organization experts were fanning out to Chinese provinces in hopes of better understanding the spread of SARS amid fears it may be much worse than admitted, a WHO official said Monday.

Up until now, the WHO's focus has been on the capital Beijing and southern Guangdong province, which have seen the largest number of cases.

But WHO officials said there were many mysteries as to why people from provinces neighbouring these places were reporting only a small number of cases, especially given the large flow of migrant workers between them.

"We don't have enough information to say exactly how the epidemic is evolving. There's still a lot of unknowns," WHO spokeswoman Mangai Balasegaram told AFP.

"That's why the teams are going out there because they don't know what's going on. If there is missing data, it (the real situation) may be much worse."

A team of experts are expected to leave this week for central Henan province, which is one of the most

heavily populated and which is still reeling from an AIDS outbreak involving hundreds of thousands of farmers contracting HIV after selling blood under unsanitary conditions.

A separate WHO team will also go to Anhui province, also in central China, which is home to about six million transient workers.

Most work in Beijing and Guangdong, the two areas that have been hardest hit by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

On Sunday, another team of experts left for Guangxi province in southern China. The area borders Guangdong province, where SARS is believed to have originated, and where the first SARS outbreak occurred.

Five WHO experts, including an infection control specialist, were Monday on their fifth day of an investigative mission to Hebei province, which borders Beijing.

The destinations are all largely rural and poor areas, which so far have only recorded a handful of cases.

Henan has reported only 15 cases, Anhui 10 cases, and Guangxi 20.

4 cops killed in attacks in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Four Indian policemen and a Kashmiri militant were killed and 10 people injured in two attacks Monday on police guarding banks in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said.

Police said rebels fired at a group from the Central Reserve Police Force in the main market of Kupwara, 100 km north of the summer capital Srinagar, killing two policemen.

The security forces returned fire, killing a militant, a police spokesman said.

He said four policemen, two army soldiers and one shopkeeper were injured in the 15-minute shootout near Kupwara's branch of the State Bank of India.

The shooting sparked panic in the busy town, which lies near the de facto border with Pakistan-administered Kashmir, with residents leaving shops and running for cover.

In a similar incident around the same time, rebels attacked police stationed outside a bank in Shopian, 50 km south of Srinagar, killing two policemen and injuring three civilians, police said.

Migration law repeal BJP, opposition parties set for a showdown

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian government's decision to repeal the Illegal Migration (Detection by Tribunal) Act of 1983 appears to have set the stage for a showdown between India's ruling BJP and main opposition Congress and the Left parties and minorities groups.

The decision by the federal cabinet to repeal the Act has drawn the battle lines between BJP and the opposition with both sides firmly sticking to their stand on the issue.

Ruling Congress party in the northeastern state of Assam and United Minorities Front (UMF) have protested the federal cabinet's decision to scrap the Act saying they would steadfastly oppose the move.

Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, who assumed power in May 2001, said "why did the BJP-led federal government decide on the matter near the end of its term? The decision made little sense because the matter is already before the Supreme Court."

Gogoi said the IMDT Act ensured a "fair process of investigation" while detecting illegal

immigrants. He favoured leaving the issue of detecting illegal immigrants to judicial scrutiny rather than to police.

The BJP and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), the former ruling party of Assam, have supported abrogation of the IMDT Act saying it "failed" to effectively check "illegal migration from Bangladesh."

Assam is the only state which is covered by IMDT Act while rest of India comes under the Foreigners' Act.

In fact, when AGP was in power it had moved the Supreme Court favouring repeal of IMDT Act but Gogoi government withdrew the petition filed by the previous government.

The United Minorities Front President Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Chowdhury alleged now that the federal government has decided to repeal IMDT Act, minorities in Assam would be "harassed."

He said the BJP wanted to bring off an "electoral stunt" by deciding to repeal IMDT Act when the term of its government was ending. "Once the Act goes, the police will be free to pick up any Bengali-speaking Muslim and push him out," he said.

Post-polls violence in West Bengal: 4 killed

Re-polling in 86 booths begins

PTI, Kolkata

Post Panchayat polls violence in West Bengal claimed the lives of four, including three CPI(M) activists, as clashes between CPI(M) and RSP were reported from South 24 Parganas and North Dinajpur districts on Monday.

In all, 15 persons were killed in poll-related clashes and bomb explosion during Sunday's Panchayat election. The run up to it had also claimed 19 lives.

Re-polling was being held at 93 booths spread across different districts. Murshidabad accounted for the largest number of 30 booths for re-poll, state election commission sources said.

The bodies of three CPI(M) supporters, killed in a clash with Congress activists, were recovered late on Sunday night from Chargopalpur and Rosannagar area under Islampur police station in Murshidabad district, district police sources said.

The body of Basudev Bhakat, a CPI(M) candidate abducted allegedly by Jharkhand Party activists on Sunday evening in West Midnapore district, was found from Panchami forest early on Monday morning, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the re-poll process in the Panchayat polls for 86 booths across West Bengal began on Monday morning.

"Barring some booths in inaccessible areas, the re-polling would be completed on Monday. The process would be conducted on Tuesday in the remaining areas," State Election Commissioner Ajay Sinha said.

Sinha said the re-poll was ordered because of printing errors and problems in distribution of ballot papers, besides reports of snatching of the papers during Sunday's Panchayat polls.

Counting of votes for the Panchayat polls would begin on Tuesday.



A policeman keeps watch as an activist belongs to Citizen Peace Committee, a Non Government Organisation (NGO), holds placard during a demonstration in Islamabad on Sunday. The protestors demanded to both Pakistan and India to give up nuclear weapons and make the way for peace.