



PHOTO: AFP

The cars of a passenger train and a goods train sit in a twisted pile after a collision in Chinchilla, (some 15 km east of Albacete) early Wednesday.

Train collision in Spain kills at least 11

AP, Madrid

Rescuers and forensic experts searched through the twisted, smoking wreckage yesterday of a head-on train collision in central Spain that left at least 11 people dead and another 16 missing.

Authorities said 38 people were injured in the crash Tuesday evening, when a passenger train carrying about 90 people and an empty freight train collided near Chinchilla in Albacete province, 155 miles southeast of Madrid.

Development Minister Francisco Alvarez Cascos said the cause of the crash may have been a railway worker who gave a wrong signal. Normally, one of the trains would have been diverted onto a side track while the other continued on the line.

The locomotive and first few cars of the Talgo passenger train caught fire after the crash and TV footage showed flaming cars piled on the tracks.

Six charred bodies were recovered from the train's bar-restaurant Wednesday morning, raising the death toll to 11, said Antonio Peinado, head of Albacete's fire service.

UN nuke inspectors to probe 'looting'

REUTERS, Vienna

A team of seven inspectors from the United Nations nuclear watchdog agency left for Iraq via Kuwait yesterday to conduct a limited probe into reports of looting at Iraq's main nuclear facility.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) task will be to determine how much nuclear material was looted from a storage site near the Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Centre after the war.

But the United States, as the occupying power in Iraq, has limited their mission to counting missing containers of radioactive material and repackaging spilled material. They will not measure environmental contamination or look into reports of radiation sickness among nearby residents.

The team is barred from entering the main Tuwaitha complex and will have no access to six other nuclear sites in Iraq that were allegedly looted in the post-war chaos.

The United States only agreed to let the agency back into Iraq after

repeated warnings by IAEA chief Mohamed ElBaradei. He said a radiological and humanitarian emergency was brewing after residents allegedly emptied containers of uranium on the ground and took the barrels to use at home.

"We don't want nuclear material anywhere lying around. We want to make sure it does not fall into the wrong hands," IAEA spokeswoman Melissa Fleming told reporters at Vienna airport.

The IAEA investigation will be confined to "Location C," the storage depot outside the Tuwaitha complex.

The IAEA team was due to arrive in Kuwait later on Wednesday and head for Iraq on Friday.

There were over 500 tons of natural uranium and 1.8 tons of low-enriched uranium stored at Tuwaitha, as well as smaller amounts of highly radioactive caesium, cobalt and strontium.

Caesium 137 is a highly radioactive powder that would be especially dangerous if used in a so-called "dirty bomb." In 1987, a canister of

caesium powder found in a Brazil junkyard exposed 249 people to radiation, killing four.

The New York Times meanwhile reported yesterday that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is reviewing an important prewar intelligence report that concluded Iraq possessed biological and chemical weapons.

The newspaper also reported that CIA investigators planned to ask the Defence Department about the role of its special intelligence unit in the development of intelligence on Iraq's weapons program.

The review, which comes amid international criticism of the United States and Britain for failing to uncover "smoking gun" proof of an Iraq weapons of mass destruction program, was described by the Times by unnamed intelligence officials.

The assertion by the United States and Britain that Iraq possessed such weapons was a prime justification of the war.

Angry Iraqis demand right to rule themselves

REUTERS, Baghdad

Muslim clerics led thousands of protesters through Baghdad's streets on Tuesday, telling US and British forces to withdraw or face violence, as Iraqi political groups demanded more say in their country's future.

The Iraqi National Congress, an umbrella group of parties that opposed Saddam Hussein mainly from exile, insisted that Iraqis rather than Americans should pick the interim Iraqi leadership that will help steer the country toward democracy.

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in charge of Iraq had been expected to convene a national conference in July to select an interim Iraqi leadership. But US

officials said during the weekend they would instead name a political council of 25 to 30 Iraqis after consulting a broad range of Iraqi opinion.

"This government will not be effective or useful for the Iraqi people," Entifadh Qanbar, a senior Iraqi National Congress official, told a news conference.

"Anything less than the Iraqis choosing their own interim government will not succeed. The Iraqis were oppressed by Saddam and want to rule themselves."

A CPA spokesman said a wide array of Iraqis would be consulted "with a view to trying to establish the political council and the constitutional convention as soon as possible."

Many Iraqis who welcomed the

fall of Saddam are growing impatient with the pace of change. Angry crowds take to the streets almost daily to demand that foreign troops leave.

"We advise you to leave our country or you will make enemies out of us," said Shi'ite cleric Muaeab al-Khazraji in a speech after a march by Muslim protesters to the headquarters of the US-led administration.

"Please go home and we will be very grateful because you got rid of Saddam."

The protesters, both Shi'ite and Sunni, demanded an end to body searches of Iraqi women at security checkpoints, and called for the establishment of a government run by Iraqis.

Tigers reject fresh govt offer for talks

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels rejected a government offer of talks on greater financial authority yesterday as European diplomats launched a fresh initiative to salvage Sri Lanka's Norwegian-backed peace bid.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said there was no change in their stance despite a letter from Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on Sunday calling for a dialogue on rebel demands for greater political power.

"We regret to say that your suggestions are unsatisfactory and therefore unacceptable," the LTTE's London-based chief negotiator, Anton Balasingham said in a letter to the prime minister released to the

media here. "...We are prepared to resume negotiations if you reconsider your position and offer us, for our consideration, a draft framework for an Interim Administrative structure along the lines proposed by our leadership."

"We hope that you will consider our suggestion favourably," Balasingham said referring to an interim council, on which the Tigers want a majority, to decide the political and financial future of the embattled northeast region.

Colombo had offered financial authority to the LTTE, but the rebels are holding out for greater political power ahead of a final settlement to a conflict that has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972.



PHOTO: AFP Delhi firefighters extinguish a fire on a truck which caught fire in the traffic after it overheated due to the extremely hot weather in New Delhi yesterday.

Military attack on Iran would be suicidal: Khamenei

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned yesterday that any military attack against the Islamic republic would be "suicide for the aggressor", in a speech that came amid mounting tension with the United States.

"The Iranian people know that the Islamic republic's leaders will not lead the country to war with anybody. We would not welcome war, but the people and their leaders will defend the country from any aggression with power and determination," Khamenei said.

"A military attack against Iran would be suicide for the aggressor," he said in his speech marking the 14th anniversary of the death of Iran's revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Tens of thousands of people were at Khomeini's vast shrine complex on the southern outskirts of Tehran for the occasion -- marked by a public holiday -- and Khamenei's defiant comments were greeted by deafening chants of "Death to America, Death to Israel".

Israel releases longest serving Palestinian prisoner

AP, Jerusalem

Israel on Tuesday released the oldest and longest-serving Palestinian prisoner in a goodwill gesture ahead of a peace summit with the Palestinians and US President George W Bush.

Ahmad Jubarah, 68, was released from the Ashkelon prison in southern Israel after serving nearly three decades for his role in a 1975 Jerusalem bomb attack that killed 13 people, the Israel prisons service announced.

He was to be dropped off at a checkpoint in the West Bank. Jubarah was among about 100 prisoners released Tuesday as part of a goodwill gesture from Israel in advance of Wednesday's three-way summit between Bush, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas. On Monday night, Tayseer Khaled, a hardline PLO official arrested in February, was also freed.

Miss Universe 2003



PHOTO: AFP

Amelia Vega, Miss Dominican Republic was crowned as the new Miss Universe during the Miss Universe pageant in Panama City on June 3, 2003. Vega, an 18-year-old high school student, won the title at a sparkling ceremony in Panama City on Tuesday night, beating a field of 70 other pageant queens with her charm and charisma.

Access to 'detained' Suu Kyi denied

Military govt rejects injury reports

BBC ONLINE, REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi spent a fifth day in custody yesterday as the United Nations sought access to her ahead of the arrival of a top envoy of Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Myanmar's military rulers have said opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is to remain in what they call "protective custody".

Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Maung Win told diplomats in the capital Yangon that she was in good health and would be released in due course.

The government detained Aung San Suu Kyi after a clash between her followers and government supporters last week.

Foreign human rights advocates have said they suspect the clash was provoked by the authorities to justify a crackdown.

However in closed-door briefings to foreign diplomats on Tuesday, Khin Maung Win blamed supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi for the violence, Reuters news agency

reported. He added that the government remained committed to political reconciliation.

The deputy foreign minister refused to say where the Nobel Peace Prize winner was being held. She has been held at undisclosed locations since her detention on Friday despite mounting calls to free her by the international community, including from US President Bush.

Though no one has yet been given access to her, an Asian diplomat close to UN special envoy Razali Ismail -- due to arrive on Friday for a five-day visit -- told Reuters the veteran Malaysian diplomat was seeking access to Suu Kyi.

"Razali is not sure if he will be allowed to see her or not," said the diplomat. "He will make his final decision on his visit at the very last moment as he feels the situation is not clear."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, following his arrival at UN headquarters from the G-8 summit in Evian on Tuesday, said it was vital Razali visits Myanmar and is given

access to Suu Kyi. Myanmar Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Muang Win said on Tuesday that Razali was welcome to go ahead with his visit, planned some weeks ago, but hinted the junta may not grant him access to Suu Kyi.

Foreign diplomats in Yangon told Reuters on Wednesday that they had been denied any contact with Suu Kyi and other top members of her NLD party who have been held house arrest.

Meanwhile there have been reports that Suu Kyi was receiving medical attention for injuries sustained during a violent clash between her supporters and pro-government demonstrators last week.

But Deputy Foreign Minister Khin Maung Win assured diplomats on Tuesday that Aung San Suu Kyi had not been injured and was in good health.

However, a BBC correspondent says that she is in fact being treated at a military camp just outside Yangon.

Blistering heatwave claims more lives

AFP, Hyderabad

At least 74 more people have died from sunstroke in India's southern state of Andhra Pradesh, taking to 1,139 the toll in the epicentre of the country's merciless heatwave, officials said yesterday.

D.C. Rosaiah, state relief commissioner, told AFP that 74 more people had died across the state, with the bulk of the casualties reported in the coastal district of Guntur bordering the Bay of Bengal.

"The toll figure has shown another sharp jump with 46 fresh casualties being reported from Guntur alone," said Rosaiah.

"Given the unprecedented scale of this tragedy our government has requested emergency assistance from the prime minister's relief fund

and they have reacted positively."

While Andhra Pradesh has borne the brunt of the heat wave, elsewhere in India 30 people have died from heat-related ailments since rising temperatures engulfed India's Gangetic plains mid-May.

In neighbouring Pakistan, at least 11 people have died on Tuesday as several cities sizzled in scorching heat, raising the toll from the current wave to more than 50, officials said Wednesday.

The mercury shot up to 48 degree Celsius (118.4 Fahrenheit) in Multan and across central Punjab province while Jacobabad and Sibi towns of southern Sindh province experienced the hottest day of the season when the temperature there rose to 50 degree Celsius (122 Fahrenheit), they said.

British PM's credibility at stake over WMDs

REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair risks losing the support of voters, including many of those who put him into power, if no weapons of mass destruction are found in Iraq, according to a poll published on Wednesday.

Blair has come under increasing pressure in the last few days about his motives for attacking Iraq amid accusations he had misled parliament and the public.

A YouGov survey for Sky News found that Britons were fairly evenly divided on whether Blair had told the truth with 46 percent of those questioned saying they trusted him while 43 percent believing he had distorted information.

Significantly 60 percent said the weapons issue would influence which party they would vote for at a general election, with 18 percent saying they might change their vote as a direct result if no weapons were found.

'I could hardly breathe', says Hillary on Clinton's affair

AP, Washington

Hillary Rodham Clinton, acknowledging tirades and tears over her husband's affair with a White House intern, says President Bill Clinton lied to her about the relationship until the weekend before he admitted as much to a grand jury.

Hillary, now a Democratic US senator from New York, vividly describes her pain over the betrayal in "Living History", her new memoir covering her eight years in the White House. A copy of the book, which goes on sale next Monday, was obtained by The Associated Press.

"The most difficult decisions I have made in my life were to stay married to Bill and to run for the Senate from New York," she writes.

She says she accepted her husband's story at first -- that he had befriended the intern, Monica Lewinsky, when she asked for job-hunting help, "had talked to her a few times" -- and that the relationship had been horribly miscon-

strued. "For me, the Lewinsky imbroglio seemed like just another vicious scandal manufactured by political opponents."

More than six months later, with the president preparing to testify before a grand jury, Mrs. Clinton was still adamant that her husband had done nothing wrong.

Then, on the morning of Saturday, August 15, 1998, he woke her up, paced at the bedside, and "told me for the first time that the situation was much more serious than he had previously acknowledged."

"He now realised he would have to testify that there had been an inappropriate intimacy. He told me that what happened between them had been brief and sporadic."

He was ashamed and knew she would be angry, she recounts. "I could hardly breathe. Gulping for air, I started crying and yelling at him, 'What do you mean? What are you saying? Why did you lie to me?'

was furious and getting more so by the second. He just stood there saying over and over again, 'I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. I was trying to protect you and Chelsea.'"

Mrs. Clinton said that up until that August morning when her husband confessed, she believed he was being railroaded and had merely been foolish by paying any attention to Lewinsky. She was incredulous that he would endanger their marriage and family.

"I was dumbfounded, heartbroken and outraged that I'd believed him at all."

She said the president's eyes filled with tears when she told him he would have to confess to their teenage daughter as well.

Mrs. Clinton's 562-page book has been highly anticipated. Publisher Simon & Schuster, expecting large sales, ordered an extraordinary first printing of 1 million copies.



PHOTO: AFP

Protesters run away from teargas on Tuesday in Saint-Denis de la Réunion, following clashes with riot police forces as they demonstrate against the French government reforms on pensions and education. France faced another day of strikes, walk-outs and street protests as public sector unions turned up the pressure on the government of Jean-Pierre Raffarin to withdraw his contested pension reform proposals.

Head of theatre centre shot dead in Moscow

AFP, Moscow

The director of the Meyerhold theatre centre in Moscow, Alfred Lerner, was shot dead outside his home in an apparent contract killing, Russian media reported yesterday.

Lerner was gunned down by a motorcyclist in broad daylight Tuesday, media said.

The Meyerhold centre is a large cultural and commercial centre that houses numerous businesses and Lerner, a former theatre director appointed to the post in 1991 while the centre was still being planned, was said to have become a hugely wealthy businessman.

According to the daily Gazeta, the Meyerhold centre -- named after the stage director and drama theorist Vsevolod Meyerhold who vanished in Stalin's purges in 1940 -- was involved in numerous real estate deals each worth millions of dollars.

Hundreds of contract killings targeting businessmen are carried out every year in Russia, with few of them ever being resolved.