

## German ice rink toll reaches 12

AFP, Bad Reichenhall

The death toll in the ice rink collapse in the German Alps rose to 12 on Wednesday after rescue workers found the body of a young boy in the rubble where three more people are believed to be trapped.

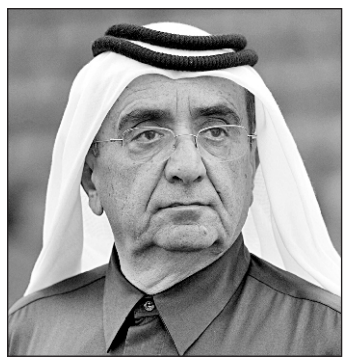
The boy was aged between 12 and 16, according to regional official Rudolf Schaupp, and is one of ten children who have died after the roof of the rink in the resort of Bad Reichenhall caved in on Monday amid heavy snow.

Rescuers racing against time were also searching for a woman in her forties and a boy and girl aged 12-16, but hopes were fading that they would be found alive.

A spokesman for the Bavarian state authorities, Christoph Abres, said late Tuesday that victims had been located but could not yet be pulled out.

"We must assume that they did not survive," he said.

## UAE premier Maktoum passes away



REUTERS, Dubai

The ruler of the Gulf Arab emirate of Dubai, Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid al-Maktoum, died on Wednesday during a private visit to Australia.

Diplomats said Maktoum, who was also vice president and prime minister of the seven-member United Arab Emirates, had suffered heart problems and was in his mid-60s.

"The UAE has today lost a historical leader who dedicated his life to building the nation and doing good for its people," a statement from the UAE presidency said.

Dubai's defense minister and Maktoum's younger brother, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum has succeeded as ruler of Dubai, the official WAM news agency said.

## US concerned over Nepal insurgency

AFP, Washington

The United States has expressed concern over the resumption of an insurgency in Nepal, urging Maoist rebels to abandon violence and calling for the restoration of democracy in the Himalayan kingdom.

Maoist leader Prachanda called off a four-month-old ceasefire with the government on Monday, which led to a series of explosions in state-owned buildings outside the Nepali capital.

"The United States is deeply concerned by the Maoists' announcement January 2 ending their unilateral ceasefire," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters on Tuesday.

"We condemn the Maoist bombings of government office buildings outside Kathmandu," he said.

## Saudi king offers to renovate Delhi mosque

AFP, New Delhi

Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, who plans to visit India this month, has offered to renovate the nation's largest mosque as well as provide money for education, The Times of India reported Wednesday.

But newspaper said the offer had raised worries among India's security agencies, who fear an influx of Saudi money could be used for the "promotion of sectarianism" in the mainly Hindu but officially secular country.

Neither the Saudi embassy nor the government were available for comment on the newspaper report.

The sprawling Jama Masjid in the Indian capital's teeming old quarter was built in 1656 by Emperor Shahjahan and is in need of repair.

In addition to repairing the mosque, which can hold 20,000 worshippers, the Saudis also wish to provide funds for education, the newspaper said.



PHOTO: AFP

People walk along their village in Cijeruk, some 370 km east of the capital Jakarta, after a landslide devastated the area yesterday. Sixteen people were confirmed dead but up to 200 were feared killed after tons of mud slammed into the village in Central Java yesterday, while at least 57 lives were lost in floods that swept through four East Java villages on January 2. Authorities had called off the rescue operation due to bad weather.

## Ukraine and Russia reach gas deal

BBC NEWS ONLINE

Russian and Ukrainian officials have reached an agreement in their dispute over the price of gas. Under the deal, Ukraine will buy a mixture of Russian and Central Asian gas for \$95 per 1,000 cubic metres.

Russia switched off the gas supply to Ukraine on 1 January after Kiev refused to agree to a price rise taking the cost of Russian gas from \$50 to \$230.

The row led to a disruption of imports across Europe, but correspondents say the threat to supplies is now over.

"We have reached a final agreement. It is successful for Gazprom and we are satisfied," the head of Russian energy company Gazprom told reporters in Moscow.

"This agreement will ensure stable supplies to Europe."

The news came as European Union officials held emergency

talks on how to ensure the security of gas supplies.

Russia supplies about a quarter of Western Europe's needs, but this proportion is due to rise dramatically in future.

Delegates from Ukrainian state energy company Naftogaz held midnight talks with Gazprom executives to try to resolve the dispute.

Under the compromise, Ukraine will buy gas from the Russian-Swiss trading company, Rosukrenerg.

Gazprom will sell gas to Rosukrenerg company for \$230 for 1,000 cubic metres from 1 January, but the company will also supply Ukraine with much cheaper gas from Turkmenistan.

The overall price Ukraine will pay is \$95 per thousand cubic metres. It will also get paid 47% more for transporting Russian gas to Europe.

Previously, Ukraine bought gas

from Turkmenistan at a price of \$50 per 1,000 cubic metres.

Analysts say the deal is a face-saving compromise for the two sides.

"It's designed so that both sides can say they're paying - and being paid - the price they wanted," Stephen O'Sullivan from Moscow investment bank UFG told the BBC News website.

The Ukrainian foreign ministry said the authorities were fully satisfied with the deal and it was a clear victory for the country.

Russia's decision to cut gas exports to Ukraine had caused dismay across Europe and spurred international efforts to mediate. Gazprom had accused Kiev of stealing gas intended for Europe.

Kiev denied any wrongdoing and said it was being punished for its attempts to become more independent from Moscow and develop stronger ties with the West.

## Relief flights resume in Pak quake zone

AFP, Muzaffarabad

Helicopters resumed relief flights in earthquake-ravaged Pakistan Wednesday after three days of rain and snow, as authorities said many survivors were descending from the mountains.

The choppers were delivering food and other vital supplies to remote villages in the Himalayan heights of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir and North West Frontier Province, although roads remained blocked.

"Relief work has resumed, the helicopters started sorties to drop relief goods to the quake-hit areas early on Wednesday," a Pakistan Army spokesman Major Farooq Nasir.

As sun brought relief from sub-zero temperatures survivors repaired their tents and shopped in the dilapidated markets of Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistani Kashmir.

"Thank God, the weather is clear today and helicopters are flying sorties," said Shahid Hasan,

the police chief of Pakistani Kashmir. "But our main thrust is to keep the road network open."

Officials said there was no shortage of food in towns and cities as stocks had already been built up in the region, which was hit by a giant quake on October 8 that killed more than 73,000 people and made 3.5 million homeless.

Survivors living in refugee camps in Muzaffarabad and other towns expressed relief that the weather had cleared, after the snow and rain caused a number of tents to collapse in recent days.

"Thanks to Allah that the rains have stopped, which had amplified all our miseries," said quake survivor Ali Ahmed, 48, while standing outside his damp, sagging tent.

However the meteorological department said a cold snap following the snowfall was likely to grip quake-hit areas for the next three to five days.

Aid agencies have warned that most of the hundreds of thousands of tents being used in the quake zone are not made for winter season.

## Hindu soldier promoted after burial

AP, Kuala Lumpur

The Malaysian government has posthumously promoted an ethnic Indian soldier whose Islamic burial despite being a Hindu had whipped up a storm of protest by minority groups last month.

Moorthy Maniam, a member of Malaysia's Mount Everest expedition in 1997 who died on December 20, 2005, was promoted from Corporal to Sergeant, the government said.

Moorthy, paralysed waist down in 1998 after an accident, was buried with Islamic rites on December 28 by the Islamic Affairs Department.

Malaysia's Islamic Sharia Court ruled last month that Moorthy had converted from Hinduism to Islam in 2004.

Moorthy's widow claims she was never told about the conversion and added that her husband participated in Hindu festivals and continued to eat pork, forbidden by Islam, during the last year. She was told about the conversion by army officials last December when Moorthy was on his death bed after slipping into a coma.

## Mine rescue turns to tragedy in US

AFP, Sago

Only one of the 13 US coal miners trapped for 41 hours underground has survived, the company which owns the mine said Wednesday, hours after it was announced that 12 men had survived.

"The initial report from the rescue teams from the command center indicated multiple survivors, but that information proved to be a miscommunication," International Coal Group (ICG) president and chief executive Ben Hatfield told reporters.

"The only confirmed survivor is Randall McCoy, who has now been rushed to a local hospital in serious condition. The 11 remaining miners in the barricade structure were determined by the medical technicians on the rescue team to have already deceased," Hatfield said.

Late Tuesday rescue teams recovered the body of a thirteenth miner, who was not a member of the work team that was found later in the tunnel.

They were trapped early Monday by an explosion that ripped through the Sago mine as they were resuming work following the Christmas and New Year holidays.

Shortly before midnight (0500 GMT Wednesday), bells pealed and cheers were heard at the Sago Baptist Church, as West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin announced: "They told us they have 12 alive."

An ambulance was seen leaving the mine with an injured miner on board, whom Hatfield later identified as the sole survivor of the tragedy. Local hospital officials said the 26-year-old miner was in critical condition and would be transferred to a larger medical center at Morgantown.

At around 3:00 am, a different scene evolved at the church as people began leaving in a state of shock and in tears after mining officials inside had confirmed the grim news that only one of the miners had survived.

Asked how such a serious mistake was made, Hatfield said ICG had taken every precaution to

make sure its information was correct but that "bad information" from the rescue team was inadvertently relayed to the outside.

"What happened is that through stray cell phone conversations it appears that this miscommunication from the rescue team underground to the command center was picked up by various people that simply overheard the conversations," Hatfield said.

"ICG never made any release about all 12 of the miners being alive and well. We simply couldn't confirm that at that point. But that information spread like wildfire because it had come from the command center, but it was a bad information," he added.

"This is certainly not the outcome that we had hoped for and prayed for. So again our hearts and prayers go out to the families," Hatfield said.

Governor Manchin later apologized for relaying the mistaken information about the survivors.

## China-Pak nuke deal should meet IAEA guidelines: US

PTI, Washington

The United States has said it has noted reports of Pakistan trying to acquire civilian nuclear reactors from China and stressed that Beijing "understands" its concerns vis-a-vis Islamabad.

The US further said that any cooperation with Pakistan would have to be under IAEA safeguards.

"We have seen press reports they (Pakistan) are negotiating possible sale of six to eight civilian nuclear reactors (from China). We are also aware that Pakistani officials have dismissed these reports as baseless," a senior US administration official said.

"China understands our concerns with Pakistan on safeguarded nuclear programme and pledged in 1996 not to provide assistance to any unsafe guarded nuclear facility in any country," the official said.

"We expect that any nuclear cooperation that China has with Pakistan will be subjected to IAEA safeguards," the official added.

## Armed militants block Rafah border crossing

AFP, Gaza City

Angry gunmen allied to the ruling Fatah party Wednesday blocked the access route to the Rafah border crossing in southern Gaza to protest the arrest of a man over the kidnapping of three Britons, witnesses said.

Around 100 gunmen took up position at the entrance to the crossing, preventing travellers from passing through the border terminal, they said.

Initially, the gunmen had allowed all civilians into the terminal after checking their identities, in a bid to stop only those affiliated with the Palestinian Authority, an AFP correspondent said.

The protest came amid demands for the release of Alaa al-Hams, a leader of the radical Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. He was arrested late Tuesday on suspicion of being behind last week's kidnapping of a British aid worker and her parents.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian gunmen close the Rafah border crossing gate between the Gaza Strip and Egypt yesterday.

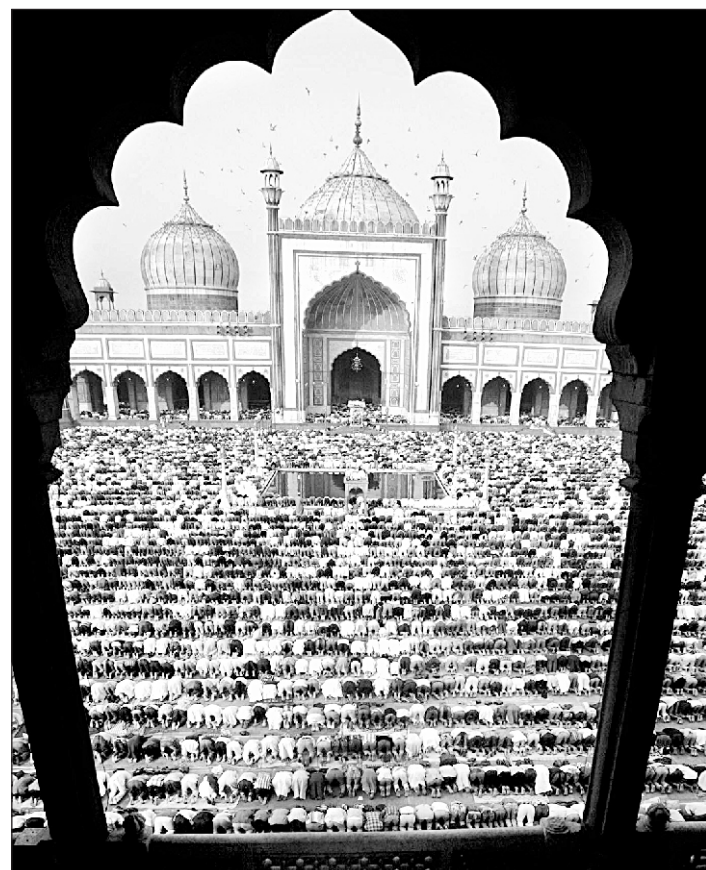


PHOTO: AFP

File picture dated November 4, 2005 shows Indian Muslims praying on the occasion of the Eid-al-Fitr festival at the Jama Masjid mosque in New Delhi.