

Floods hit more than 250,000 in northeast India

More than 250,000 people have been displaced by floodwaters in India's northeast where at least 13 people have died since the monsoon hit a fortnight ago, officials said Thursday.

Incessant rains caused fresh flooding in Assam state Wednesday, forcing 92,000 people to flee their homes. Bhumidhar Barman, the state's rehabilitation minister told AFP.

"Breaches in embankments and rising levels of all major rivers have led to floodwaters inundating fresh areas, affecting an estimated population of 242,000," he said.

Another 10,000 people were cut off in neighbouring Tripura state. Authorities have set up nearly 3,500 makeshift shelters to accommodate those left homeless by the rising waters, said Barman.

Eleven districts in Assam have been deluged by floodwaters, with tens of thousands of people losing their homes and crop lands, he said.

One man drowned late Wednesday, taking the toll since the monsoon rains began lashing the northeast of the country last month to 13.

Five dead in 'terrorist' attack on Pak police

No one claimed responsibility for the attack

AFP, Karachi

Gunmen on motorcycles ambushed a police car in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi on Thursday, killing four policemen, including a deputy jail chief, and a pedestrian, police said.

Five or six attackers riding three bikes surrounded the unmarked white Toyota Corolla in a busy street and sprayed it with bullets, also hitting a civilian car, police officer Sanaullah Abbasi told AFP.

Authorities said the ambush targeted Amanullah Khan Niazi, deputy superintendent of Karachi central prison. Six people were also wounded, including Niazi's brother.

The jail where Niazi worked currently houses British-born Islamic extremist Ahmed Saad Sheikh, also known as Sheikh Omar, who was sentenced to death over the 2002 kidnap and

killing of US reporter Daniel Pearl. "Niazi was under threat but at this stage I can't tell which group or people he was facing the threat from," Rauf Siddiqui, the home minister of Sindh province, told AFP.

"It is an act of terrorism and Niazi was the target of the attack. A high level inquiry has been ordered."

No one claimed responsibility for the attack, which happened near the city's biggest electronics market, but Karachi has long been riven by sectarian, ethnic and political violence.

Officials would not speculate on whether there was a link to Al-Qaeda or other extremist groups.

Both cars were riddled with bullet holes, with pools of blood splashed across the seats, the steering wheel and the dashboard, and all the windows smashed, witnesses said.

A bloodstained beret and shoe

lay on the front seat of the police car. "A policeman who was at the scene saw the attackers and opened fire on the assailants, but it was not clear if his retaliatory fire hit the attackers or not," Abbasi said.

One of the motorcycles was abandoned at the scene. A prison official who was wounded in the attack said their car came under attack when they turned at a traffic signal.

"Suddenly a bullet hit a windshield and I lowered myself in the car. There was massive firing and I was hit in the leg," the official named Waris, who goes by only one name, said at the civil hospital.

Shootings and bombings are relatively common in volatile Karachi, despite a recent lull. In 2004, 11 people were killed in a gun attack on the city's army commander, blamed on Al-Qaeda. The commander survived.



Pakistani police officials and people gather around a bullet-riddled car after unknown gunmen opened fire in Karachi yesterday. Gunmen opened fire in a busy street in Karachi, killing five people including the deputy chief of the southern Pakistani city's main jail. The attackers sprayed two cars with bullets including an unmarked Toyota Corolla which was carrying policemen.

India-US make 'good progress' on nuke talks

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Senior officials of India and the United States reported "good progress" on reaching a common position on the proposed bilateral nuclear agreement as they wound up first round of talks here.

Keen to conclude the agreement at the earliest, the two sides decided to hold "fairly soon" the second round of discussions on the Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, also called 123 Agreement.

The two sides had "very productive discussions", sources told PTI after three-day talks which ended on Thursday evening with the two countries holding tough negotiations on various aspects of the agreement, particularly issues like future nuclear testing by India and assurances on atomic fuel supplies by the US.

The two countries made "good progress to reach an agreed text" on the pact, the sources said.

Wary of its past experience, India would like the US to assure supplies of nuclear fuel to its civilian nuclear facilities safeguarded under the International Atomic Energy Agency supervision.



Afghan locals stand at the site of a bomb attack, in the southern city of Kandahar yesterday. A bomb ripped through a minibus taking people to work at a coalition-run airport in Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar, killing 10 of them and wounding 15, police said. The morning rush-hour blast in the centre of the city appeared to have been caused by a bomb inside the minibus that exploded after a collision with another vehicle, police Colonel Shir Shah said.

At least 10 dead in Afghan bomb attack

REUTERS, Kandahar

A powerful bomb tore apart a minibus carrying Afghan labourers to a US military base in on Thursday, killing about 10 amid growing violence before

NATO takes over from US troops in the volatile south.

Three shops were destroyed and twisted metal and a large pool of blood covered the street at the scene of the attack which occurred during rush hour in the southern city of Kandahar, the heartland of the Taliban.

It was the latest incident in the worst wave of violence since US-led forces toppled the Taliban in 2001.

"It was a big explosion. We don't know if the explosives were in the minibus or not," said a policeman at the scene, Raaz Mohammad. "We have seen more than 10 dead people with legs and hands blown off being brought out of the bus."

Kandahar police chief Azizullah Wardak said the blast was caused by explosives apparently hidden in the bus.

He said he knew of at least seven dead. The bomb went off soon after the bus made a regular stop to buy bread at a bakery, before heading to

Pakistan, China start first bus service

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan and China launched their first passenger bus service Thursday, linking the northern Pakistani town of Gilgit with the western Chinese city of Kashgar, officials said.

Twisting through the mountains along the scenic Karakoram Highway, the 550-kilometre journey takes around 16 hours.

The service will run each way three times a week.

"This is the first ever bus service in more than 50 years of diplomatic relations between our two countries," Zafar Iqbal, managing director of the state-run Northern Area Transport Company, told AFP by telephone.

Pakistani Communications Minister Shamim Siddiqi waved off the first bus carrying 16 passengers, including businessmen and tourists. A second bus with officials and media also left Thursday morning.

A Chinese bus left Kashgar almost simultaneously and was due to cross the border and arrive in Gilgit later in the evening.

Tickets cost 44 dollars. Travellers will need visas from Islamabad or Beijing.

Maoists and govt hold peace talks

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist rebels and the government began their second round of preliminary peace talks in the capital Thursday, witnesses said.

"The talks will revolve around the forming of a monitoring team for the ceasefire, discussions about the drafting of an interim constitution and the possibility of high-level talks," Pradeep Gyawali, minister for tourism and a member of the government's negotiating team, told journalists as he went into discussions with the rebels.

The Maoists have waged a decade-long insurgency in which some 12,500 people have been killed.

They have observed a ceasefire with the interim government that came to power in April after mass protests forced King Gyanendra to end 14 months of direct rule.

The current talks are the third attempt to hammer out a peace deal since the insurgency began.

The preliminary talks may lead to a meeting between rebel leader Prachanda and Prime Minister

Girija Prasad Koirala before the premier travels to Bangkok for medical treatment on Saturday said Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a Maoist spokesman.

Krishna Prasad Sitaula, home minister and leader of the government preliminary talks team, was optimistic when contacted by AFP.

"I have found the Maoists positive on the developing situation in the country, especially after my meeting with Maoist chairman Prachanda and (second-in-command) Baburam Bhattarai," Sitaula said.

The rebels' key demand is for a constituent assembly to review the 1990 constitution and abolish the 250-year-old monarchy.

King Gyanendra said he seized power in February 2005 because the government had failed to tackle the Maoist rebellion.

But the government and the rebels formed a loose alliance against the king in November 2005 and cooperated in mass demonstrations in April that led to the reinstatement of parliament.

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PHOTO: AFP

Russian President Vladimir Putin (R) shakes hands with his Pakistani counterpart Pervez Musharraf during their bilateral meeting in Shanghai yesterday, after the session of SCO, a security grouping anchored by Russia and China, which has styled itself as a counterweight to US global dominance.

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