

Tetanus kills 21 people in quake-hit Indonesia

AFP, Jakarta

Twenty-one people have died from tetanus in the aftermath of last month's earthquake in Indonesia's central Java island, the health ministry said Friday.

They were among 60 people infected with tetanus after they were injured by rubble when the quake destroyed their homes, the ministry said in a statement.

Thirty seven of those are still in hospital, it said.

Health officials on June 7 launched a vaccination campaign for more than one million people affected by the May 27 quake, which killed nearly 5,800 people.

They have warned that conditions in the affected area could lead to a rapid transmission among adults of tetanus that affects muscles and nerves usually from contaminated wounds. It typically appears 10-15 days after such a disaster.

The 6.3-magnitude earthquake injured more than 36,000 people and left more than 340,000 homeless.

Pakistani mob kills teacher, beats mullah for blasphemy

AFP, Multan

A frenzied mob beat a teacher to death when he tried to help a Muslim cleric in a row over the alleged desecration of the Koran, a local police chief said Friday.

The prayer leader was attacked by more than 1,000 people at Hasilpur town in central Punjab province after claims that he burned pages from an old copy of the holy book near a drain, Nasir Sayal told AFP.

"A retired school teacher came in and tried to save the cleric but he was also severely beaten by the mob and later died in hospital," he said.

Both victims belonged to the hardline Islamic Jamaat-ud-Dawa party, an incarnation of the banned Kashmir militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, he added.

An angry crowd also attacked a police vehicle and broke its windshield when it tried to rescue the two men, Sayal said.

US retracts terrorist warning in China

AFP, Beijing

The United States retracted Friday a warning of possible terrorist attacks against US interests in China following a joint investigation with Chinese authorities on the potential threat.

"After further investigation and coordination with the Chinese authorities, the United States government has determined that the information provided on June 9, 2006 no longer warrants a heightened level of concern," a notice on the embassy website said.

"American citizens in China are always advised to be aware of their surroundings and remain alert to possible threats," it said.

No other details of the threat or the subsequent investigation were provided.

The June 9 warning referred to a strong threat in places where Americans were known to congregate or visit, including clubs, restaurants, places of worship, schools or outdoor recreation events.



PHOTO: AFP

An Iraqi soldier looks at destruction inside Baratha Shiite mosque in Baghdad yesterday after a suicide bomber blew himself up killing at least 11 people. The attack came despite a massive clampdown in the capital ordered by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki that saw vehicles banned from the capital's streets during Friday prayer time and tens of thousands of Iraqi and US soldiers out on patrol.

Sri Lanka bombs rebels but vows peace

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president has vowed not to allow the killing of 64 bus passengers derail the island's peace process as the air force bombed Tamil Tiger positions for a second straight day.

President Mahinda Rajapakse insisted the Norwegian-brokered process would not be allowed to collapse following Thursday's Claymore mine attack on the bus, the deadline against civilians here in 10 years.

"We will not allow incidents like this to scuttle the peace process," the president told survivors and relatives of bus massacre victims on Thursday, an official in his office said.

The government blamed the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the carnage, but the guerrillas denied involvement.

"We will not allow this type of barbaric terrorist attack to happen

again," the president said. "We must resolve the conflict peacefully. No one can resolve problems through this type of violence."

Rajapakse ordered security to be boosted in the remote Kebutigolla area where an overcrowded bus was hit with the mine blast.

Despite the peace vow, at first light Friday jets resumed retaliatory attacks against suspected Tiger positions.

"The airforce carried out two bombing sorties over Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu," a military source here said, referring to two northern areas held by the Tigers.

"The identified targets of the LTTE are being taken this morning," he said.

The military said there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet website said an aerial attack in the district

of Mullaitivu on Thursday was near a tsunami refugee camp, but that there were no casualties.

"At least six bombs were dropped near the refugee camp," Tamilnet said. "Two of the bombs did not explode."

It said people had "escaped injuries from the indiscriminate bombing from a high altitude by supersonic jets."

However, it reported at least one four-metre deep crater.

The renewed air attacks came as government officials began handing over the bodies of Thursday's blast, whose victims included 15 children, to their families.

A mass funeral was to take place in the north central district of Anuradhapura, 200 kilometres from the capital Colombo on Saturday, but some of the victims were being buried Friday.

International condemnation of the massacre mounted.

Suicide bomber kills 11 in Iraq mosque

AFP, Baghdad

At least 19 people were killed across Iraq, including 11 in Baghdad when a suicide bomber blew himself up inside a massive Shiite mosque despite a security crackdown in the capital, police said.

The blast, which also wounded 25 people, came just an hour before the main weekly Muslim prayers, when the Baratha mosque would have been filled with thousands of worshippers.

On April 7, a triple suicide bombing by men dressed as women targeted worshippers just as they were leaving the same mosque, killing 90 and wounding 175.

Friday's blast came despite a security crackdown that saw vehicles banned from the capital's streets during prayer time and tens of thousands of Iraqi and US soldiers out on patrol.

Two people were also killed and 16 wounded when four mortar

rounds struck a house and a shop in Baghdad's Sab al-Bur neighbourhood.

Gunmen in two trucks stormed two villages in the early hours Friday and killed three people and kidnapped nine others, police said.

The two villages are located near the town of Suwayrah, 50 kilometres south of Baghdad.

In another incident, one person was killed and another kidnapped when men dressed in Iraqi army uniforms attacked a house in Al-Jahar village near the town of Madain, 25 kilometres south of Baghdad.

"The gunmen stormed the house, dragged the two men out and killed one of them in front of the house and took away the other," a police officer said.

An Iraqi army soldier was also shot dead by gunmen in the northern town of Hawija, while an employee of the Northern Gas Company was similarly shot dead

near the oil city of Kirkuk, police said.

On Thursday night, a woman and her four children were killed in Baquba when a bomb went off in a neighbor's house bringing the ceiling down on the family sleeping in the garden, police said.

US military said on Friday it had started an investigation into the deaths last month of three men in the custody of US-led forces in Iraq. Lieutenant General Peter Chiarelli, the number two US commander in Iraq, ordered the investigation of the deaths which occurred on or around May 9 in Salahaddin province.

"The request for an investigation is the result of soldiers' reported suspicions about the deaths," said the statement.

The investigation is taking place amid another probe of allegations that U.S. Marines killed up to 24 unarmed civilians in the town of Haditha last year.

India officially joins race for UN top job

AFP, New Delhi

India officially nominated Thursday UN Undersecretary General Shashi Tharoor for the world body's top job which it said should rightfully come to Asia when Kofi Annan ends his term this year.

"India's nomination of Tharoor for the post is based on (the UN's) commitment to the rotational principle under which the next secretary-general should be from Asia," foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna said after announcing Tharoor's nomination.

Having given its backing to the 50-year-old diplomat, India was now looking for international support, Sarna told a media conference here.

"We have taken up this issue of seeking support for the candidature of Mr Tharoor through diplomatic channels with all member countries of the United Nations and our missions are actively seeking such support," he said.

"It is a matter of pride for a son of India and son of Asia to become the secretary-general."

South Africa marks Soweto uprising anniversary

AFP, Soweto

South African President Thabo Mbeki led commemorations to mark the 30th anniversary of the Soweto uprising, a watershed in the anti-apartheid struggle, when hundreds of children protesting at the forced teaching of Afrikaans died in a brutal police crackdown.

Mbeki, accompanied by dignitaries including Nelson Mandela's former wife Winnie, led a march of hundreds from Soweto's Morris Isaacson School -- one of the key-points of the 1976 uprising -- to a memorial to arguably its most famous victim.

Hundreds of children, veterans of the "Class of '76", council workers and civil servants took part in the five-kilometre trek to the Hector Pieterse Memorial.

They stopped briefly to observe a minute's silence to honour the memory of Pieterse and the hundreds of other people killed by police over the next year.



PHOTO: AFP

A Sri Lankan government soldier patrols a sea-front promenade yesterday in Colombo after security was stepped up across Sri Lanka following a suspected Tamil Tiger Claymore mine attack that killed 64 civilian bus passengers a day before. President Mahinda Rajapakse vowed that the attack will not be allowed to derail the faltering peace process.



PHOTO: AFP

Visiting Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah (R) shakes hands with Indian Leader of the Opposition L. K. Advani (L) prior to a meeting in New Delhi yesterday. India and Kuwait signed three agreements to boost ties after Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah held talks with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The agreements covered avoidance of double taxation, cooperation in checking narcotics smuggling, and boosting cultural ties.

East Timor rebels surrender arms to foreign troops

AFP, Maubisse

East Timor's rebel soldiers began surrendering their weapons Friday to Australian-led international peacekeeping forces, obeying an order from President Xanana Gusmao.

The rebels, led by Major Alfredo Reinado, handed over 12 M16 rifles, four handguns and ammunition to Australian troops who later secured the weapons inside a steel container.

"Everybody has to cooperate. This is only another mechanism to reach the objective. The objective is peace and justice," Reinado told reporters after the weapons turnover in the hill town of Maubisse south of the capital.

Asked about what he would do for protection, Reinado said: "My president (Gusmao) is my protection."

He said Australian troops were also responsible for the rebels' security, claiming armed groups linked to Prime Minister Mari Alkati were continuing to make

threats against his life. Reinado, who leads 600 break-away soldiers, retreated to a hide-out in Maubisse in the wake of street violence that gripped the country last month and resulted in the deaths of at least 21 people.

The highly popular Gusmao, who led East Timor's guerrilla resistance against occupying Indonesia during most of its 24-year rule, has maintained the trust of the rebels who are demanding Alkatiri step down.

Alkatiri was responsible in March for sacking the 600 soldiers, nearly half the tiny nation's armed forces, after they deserted their barracks complaining of discrimination.

The move triggered the violence and subsequent arson and looting that forced 130,000 people to flee their homes in fear. Some 2,200 peacekeepers from Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Portugal are now patrolling the streets of the capital to restore peace and order. Reinado said more weapons

would be arriving from the Maubisse area that he controls in the next few days. Other rebel factions in the nearby district of Gleno were simultaneously surrendering their firearms to peacekeepers, he said.

Reinado refused to consider himself a deserter and maintained that he remains "loyal" to Gusmao, the country's supreme military chief.

Reinado earlier warned that the surrender of the weapons did not mean the crisis was over, refusing to say how many weapons he exactly controls.

"We just started the process. No guarantee," he stressed, when asked if the tiny Catholic nation would now return to normal.

An opposition party leader said the surrender may have a "calming effect" on the tense nation. "This means that Reinado is setting an example and other armed groups must follow. Everyone must now leave their weapons to the peacekeepers," Manuel Tilman said.

Party offices to quit Delhi's colonial heritage zone

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian cabinet Friday approved a plan to winkle political parties out of their grand offices in New Delhi's stately heritage zone built under the British Raj, a minister said.

The Supreme Court this year ordered the parties, including the ruling Congress and the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to vacate the sprawling colonial complexes in the heart of the capital.

The court asked the government to allot land for new party offices away from the preservation area.

The cabinet agreed for land to be allotted to the parties, who have three years to move out of their official bungalows, designed by Sir Edward Lutyens.

"This exercise (of allotting land) is to be completed in three years," Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee told reporters after a cabinet meeting.

mission and which have more than seven members will be given subsidised plots. The area would be proportionate to the party's strength in parliament.

But the parties said the cabinet decision was discriminatory.

"In a democracy, the numbers keep changing. Probably the Congress took the decision in anticipation of its future," BJP spokesman Ravi Shankar Prasad said in a dig at the ruling party.

"I think it is not fair," said Abani Roy of the left-leaning Revolutionary Socialist Party.

The London-born Lutyens spent 20 years working on "imperial" New Delhi, which replaced Calcutta, now Kolkata, as the Indian capital in 1912. The architect designed the imposing Viceroy's palace which now serves as the official residence of the Indian president, the circular parliament and government buildings and the capital's sandstone war memorial, India Gate.

Rainstorms, flash floods kill 52 in southwest China

AFP, Beijing

Persistent rainstorms and flash floods in southwestern China have killed a total of 52 people and left another 20 missing, state media reported Friday.

Torrential rains in May and June hit 293 townships in Guizhou province, paralyzing local transport and interrupting telecommunications and power supplies, Xinhua news agency reported.

More than 30 people died and 2,400 houses collapsed in the worst-hit county of Wangmo where 1,500 hectares (3,705 acres) of farmland were also damaged, said the report, quoting a local party secretary.

The disasters have also caused 1.3 billion yuan (162.5 million dollars) in economic losses, the Guizhou provincial flood control and drought relief headquarters estimated.

The rainy season is forecast to last until mid-July.

LONDON SUBWAY SHOOTING Family outraged at delayed reports

AFP, London

The family of an innocent Brazilian man shot dead by police in London last year expressed their frustration on Friday at continued delays to an investigation into the police handling of the case.

Relatives of Jean Charles de Menezes said they had been told the watchdog Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC), may not now report until the end of the year.

They also criticised the failure of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to decide whether any of the officers who fired the fatal shots at Stockwell Underground station in south London will be charged.

A pre-inquest hearing into the 27-year-old electrician's death was due to take place in south London later Friday.

"The family will be expressing their frustration that the inquest

proceedings cannot commence further as a result of continuing delays by the CPS in reaching a conclusion to their decision into possible prosecutions for those officers involved in the shooting," they said in a statement.

"The family is increasingly angry at the ever slowing pace of the CPS in coming to a decision and expects to ask the coroner to put pressure on the CPS for a speedy conclusion."

Two separate IPCC inquiries were launched after the fatal shooting -- "Stockwell 1" into events leading up to and including the shooting itself, and "Stockwell 2", which is reviewing the police's handling of the aftermath.

The second inquiry is looking in particular into comments made by Metropolitan Police chief Sir Ian Blair that the July 22 shooting was linked to the alleged attacks on London's public transport network a day earlier.



PHOTO: AFP

Rescuers work at the site of a powerful blast that rocked an apartment house in western Moscow yesterday, collapsing its third and fourth storeys and killing at least two persons, according to a Russian NTV channel report, quoting the city's rescue services.