

## Pak landslides creating 2nd wave of quake refugees: UN

AFP, Islamabad

Landslides and floods triggered by monsoon rains are creating thousands of new refugees in parts of Pakistan that were devastated by last October's earthquake, the UN refugee agency warned.

More than 6,000 quake survivors have fled dangerous areas and nearly 20,000 more are set to seek refuge in camps, said Kilian Kleinschmidt, the agency's senior emergency coordinator for the South Asia earthquake.

"The likelihood of larger displacement due to the ongoing monsoon is very grave," Kleinschmidt told AFP in an interview late Thursday.

"It is very big and we have already seen more than 6,000 newcomers into camps over the last three weeks" in the Pakistani Kashmir towns of Bagh, Garhi Habibullah and Muzaffarabad, he said.

"Currently there are 32,000 people in organised camps and we estimate up to 50,000 by the end of the monsoon."

Donors and aid agencies are meeting to prepare for the feared second wave of refugees, Kleinschmidt said. Pakistani officials confirmed that 6,615 quake survivors had been moved from 23 villages in areas threatened by landslides.

## 'Israel heading toward Lebanon occupation'

AFP, Jerusalem

Following Israel's bloodiest day in its war against Hezbollah, the Jewish state once again appears headed toward the snare of a ground occupation in south Lebanon, analysts said yesterday.

"We did not intend this or want this, but we are approaching with giant steps the last and largest operation level in this book of war - the takeover of the territory up to the Litani River," wrote the nation's mass-selling Yedioth Aharonot.

On Thursday, after eight civilians were killed by Hezbollah rockets and four soldiers killed in clashes with the Shiite militants, Defense Minister Amir Peretz ordered the army to prepare for a takeover of south Lebanon up to the Litani River.

The river runs from east to west across southern Lebanon and is in various locations between five and 30km from the Israeli border.

Israel has been in much of this territory before - between 1985 and 2000 it occupied an area that reached eight to 15km inside Lebanon along 100km of the border.

The Jewish state withdrew under intense public pressure and a rising troop toll in 2000, and officials have repeatedly said they have no intention of returning to the Lebanese

"trap" at the end of this war.

"The goal was and remains to push back Hezbollah, prevent the rocket fire and to allow the deployment of an international force in south Lebanon, not to install ourselves on Lebanese territory," Yigal Palmor, a spokesman for the foreign affairs ministry, told AFP Friday in the latest such statement.

Captain Jacob Dalal, an army spokesman, also told AFP: "What we want is to uproot Hezbollah from the villages where they're implanted, not to occupy the villages."

But therein lies the main problem faced by Israel, analysts say.

The only way to stop Hezbollah from firing the short-range rockets is to be present on the ground in Lebanon south of the Litani River, from where most of them have been fired, they say.

"There is no army in the world that can shut down such a sophisticated rocket array which is spread over an entire country and mostly concealed, within a few weeks," Maariv, the nation's second-largest daily, wrote in an analysis.

"It is necessary to take over the country house by house, or else wait for the stock to run out."

Aharonot's analysis also questioned the late decision to send a massive force of ground troops into southern Lebanon.

"How is it that only in the fourth week of warfare did we realize that the short-range Katyusha rocket fire can only be substantially reduced if the IDF is physically present in the launching grounds?" Aharonot wrote.

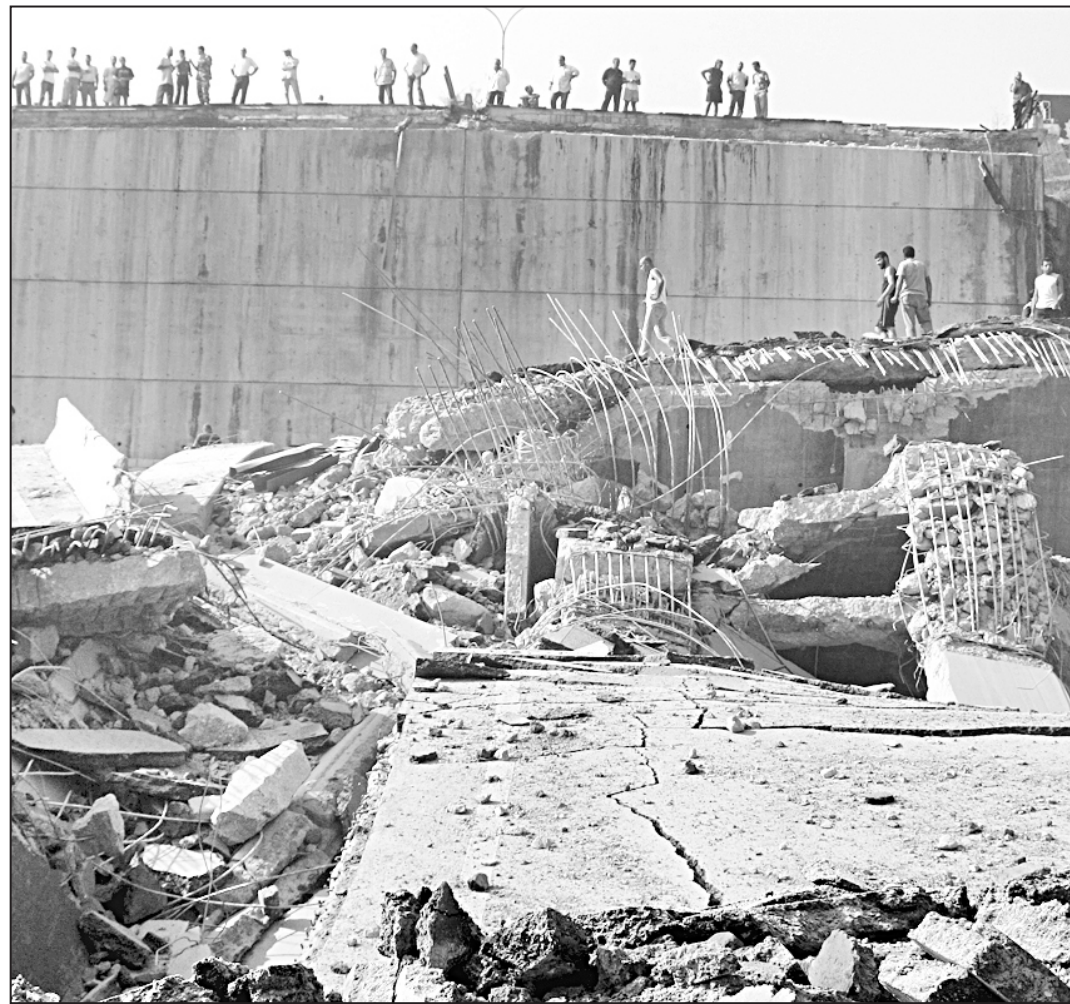
The military admits that it has not dented Hezbollah's stockpile of short-range Katyusha rockets.

"Hezbollah still has full capability to launch short-range rockets," a senior military official told reporters on Thursday. "We haven't damaged them."

Out of an estimated 13,000 short-range rockets that Israeli intelligence thought Hezbollah to possess in the beginning of the war, it has only destroyed 1,500, the official said.

When combined with the 2,200 that Hezbollah has fired at Israel, that leaves the militia with more than 9,000 rockets after 24 days of intense bombardment of Lebanon by air, sea and land.

The military says that in the three-plus weeks of the war so far, it has concentrated on taking out Hezbollah's medium and long-range rockets, which have the capacity to hit Israel's most populous central region.



Lebanese people gather at the destroyed Halat main bridge linking northern Lebanon with the rest of the country after it was hit by an Israeli air strike yesterday.

## Floods kill 31 more people in India

AP, Hyderabad

Floods caused by heavy monsoon rains swept away people and destroyed homes in southern India, killing at least 31 people, officials said yesterday.

The deaths occurred Thursday and Friday in the coastal area of the state of Andhra Pradesh, where some 50,000 people sought refuge in relief camps on higher ground after their homes were flooded, disaster management official GT Priyadarshini said.

Tens of thousands of others have been affected by the flooding across India.

Reports from local officials in various parts of the country indicate at least 342 people have died so far in this year's monsoon, which runs from April to September. An accurate national death toll is not kept, and the total number of people killed across India is likely much higher.

"The situation is quite alarming but the administration in the affected districts is taking all the necessary measures to help the people," Priyadarshini said.

She said 26 deaths were reported from the Vizianagaram, Srikakulam and Vishakhapatnam districts of north coastal Andhra Pradesh, deluged under severe flooding for three days. Twenty-one others were injured in the three badly hit districts, and many of them were in serious condition.



Protesters burn a mock flag of Israel and the US during an anti-war protest outside the Israel embassy in Manila yesterday. The protesters were demanding an immediate halt to Israeli air raids on suspected Hezbollah positions, stressing that innocent civilians have been killed.

## UN alarmed about Gaza humanitarian 'tragedy'

### Bridge bombing cripples Lebanon aid pipeline

AFP, Reuters, Gaza City/Beirut

The United Nations said yesterday it was "deeply alarmed" that the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip was being forgotten due to Israel's ongoing offensive in Lebanon.

"We are concerned that with international attention focusing on Lebanon, the tragedy in Gaza is being forgotten," the UN said in a statement.

The Israeli military has waged a month-long offensive in the coastal strip following the killing of two soldiers and an abduction of a third by Gaza militants on June 25.

At least 163 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier have been killed in the offensive, according to an AFP count, and much of the densely-packed territory's infrastructure has

been destroyed, including its one power plant.

"The United Nations humanitarian agencies working in the occupied Palestinian territory are deeply alarmed by the impact continuing violence is having on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Gaza," said the UN statement.

The UN said that according to its figures, 175 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli offensive, including approximately 40 children and eight women. More than 620 Palestinians have been wounded, the statement said.

On the Israeli side, UN estimates that one soldier has been killed and 25 wounded, including 11 from homemade rockets fired from Gaza.

"All parties to the conflict are obliged to protect civilians during hostilities," the statement said.

Meanwhile, Israel's overnight bombing of highway bridges in northern Lebanon and strikes at a Hezbollah stronghold in south Beirut paralyzed aid convoys on Friday and relief workers warned of a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Israeli jets destroyed three bridges on the main coastal highway linking Beirut to Syria, stalling an eight-truck convoy carrying food, shelter material and other aid to the estimated 900,000 Lebanese displaced by the three-week-old war.

Astrid van Genderen Stort, senior information officer for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees said the bombing had shut down the major relief pipeline for supplies travelling to the hardest-hit areas in the south.

## Insurgents kill 23 Iraqis in wave of bombings

### 2 GIs slain in Anbar province

AFP, Reuters, Baghdad

Insurgent fighters killed at least 23 Iraqis, most of them police officers, in a wave of bombings across the country yesterday, after US generals warned the country could slip into civil war.

While much attention was focused on Baghdad, where hundreds of thousands of Shia activists marched in support of Lebanon's Hezbollah militia, the worst of the violence erupted well beyond the capital in the far north.

Two US Marines were killed in action in separate incidents in Iraq's restive Anbar province west of Baghdad, the US military said.

The marines, assigned to Regimental Combat Team 5, died on Thursday.

The northern city of Mosul woke to a dawn blitz of six bombs and a hail of mortars, which killed at least nine police officers and triggered a six-hour gunbattle in which an unknown num-

ber of insurgents were killed.

Nineveh Province's police chief, Major General Wathiq al-Hamdani, blamed fighters inspired by the Saudi extremist Osama bin Laden for the attack.

"These are members of al-Qaeda that we clashed with. We killed large numbers of them and we burned their trucks and vehicles. We are in full control of the situation. The people of Mosul were very helpful," he told state television.

Mosul, 370km from Baghdad, has a majority Sunni Arab population and significant Turkmen and Kurdish ethnic minorities. It is often the scene of violent attacks on security forces.

"The situation is still volatile, and clashes are continuing in parts of the city," a senior officer told AFP from Mosul, adding that a vehicle curfew had been imposed from 10 am (0600 GMT) Friday until 6 am on Saturday.

## Civilians flee on foot as SL fighting rages

Reuters, Trincomalee

Thousands of civilians fled Sri Lanka's eastern battle zone on foot yesterday as shells fell nearby during an artillery battle between Tamil Tiger rebels and the army, the Red Cross said.

Small pockets of rebels continued firefighting with troops in the eastern Muslim town of Mutur, where aid workers say between 20,000-30,000 people have been trapped by the fighting.

Tamil Tigers also attacked army camps and Norway's peace envoy flew in to discuss the future of Nordic truce monitors as the island slides back to civil war.

"The people are confused and don't know what to do. The problem is they are stuck at an army checkpoint," said Yvonne Dunton, head of the Trincomalee office of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Around 6,700 families were

on foot, she added.

Aid trucks organised by local groups drove east towards the southern end of Mutur carrying food and water, white flags flying from their windows.

At least 20 civilians, 12 Tigers and one soldier were killed on Thursday. The military says it has killed more than 70 rebels in the past week and the Tigers say they have the bodies of 40 troops ready to hand over. But each side dismisses the other's claims.

"(The Tigers) are attacking our camps in the east. There is artillery and mortar fire," said military spokesman Major Upali Rajapakse.

"There are some civilians being injured." "There are some Tigers in Mutur town. They are trying to move west into certain areas they control."

There were other isolated attacks in the north-central district of Vavuniya and in the eastern district

of Batticaloa, where a breakaway rebel faction attacked a camp of the mainstream Tigers, killing five fighters.

Amid fears the fighting could spread to the Sinhalese-majority south, police arrested two suspected rebel fighters in a lorry carrying claymore mines and hand grenades in the port town of Galle 100km south of Colombo.

The fighting is the most intense and prolonged since a 2002 truce and diplomats and some military personnel say the civil war that began in 1983 appears to have resumed in all but name.

Well over 800 people have been killed so far this year in escalating attacks and military clashes between the army and the Tigers, who are furious at President Mahinda Rajapakse's outright rejection of their demand for a separate homeland for ethnic Tamils in the north and east.

## Cuba on alert as Bush calls for democracy

AFP, Washington

Cuba was on heightened alert Thursday, wary of what many fear is a possible invasion by US-based Cuban exiles, as US President George W. Bush called on islanders to push for democracy with strongman Fidel Castro sidelined by surgery.

While Fidel and his younger brother Raul have yet to appear in public since the elder Castro handed power to his sibling Monday, Bush said the United States was ready to help Cuba's transition to democracy.

"I urge the Cuban people to work for democratic change on the island," Bush said in his first statement since Fidel temporarily relinquished power to Raul while he recovers from surgery.

"We will support you in your effort to build a transitional government in Cuba committed to democracy, and we will take note of those, in the current Cuban regime, who obstruct your desire for a free Cuba," Bush said.

The US State Department earlier lashed out at the "imposition" of Raul Castro as interim president replacing the 79-year-old Fidel.

There was no immediate reaction from the Cuban government, but panelists on a government news show panned Bush's call.

The director of the Juventud Rebelde (Rebel Youth) newspaper said that Bush had delivered "tin pot rhetoric" and "hollow blathering," while legislator Randy Alonso dismissed Bush's statement as "the epitome of delirium and dry inebriation."

While the island has largely been calm since the late Monday hand-over announcement, tension began to rise Thursday with announcements in the official media of "combat alerts" and reservists being called to military duty.

"The means of combat are ready to defend us," announced the front page of the official newspaper Granma.



Afghan men carry a motor-bike at the site of a suicide car bomb attack in Kandahar Thursday. Nato pushed yesterday with a big anti-Taliban operation in a southern Afghan rebel stronghold where a suicide bomber killed 21 people and four Canadian troops died in other attacks.

## Nato patrols escape 2 bombings

### Coalition forces kill 25 Taliban

AFP, Kabul

Two bombs exploded yesterday near Nato patrols in an area of southern Afghanistan that saw a series of bloody attacks a day earlier, while security forces said they had killed 25 rebels.

The violence further highlighted the dangers facing a Nato force that took command of the country's volatile south on Monday and which has lost seven soldiers in rebel attacks since then.

The early morning bombs exploded in restive Kandahar province as Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) patrols passed, but caused no damage or casualties to the force, a spokesman said.

The first destroyed a civilian vehicle but it seemed unlikely it was a vehicle-borne suicide bomb of the sort that killed 21 civilians in the area

on Thursday, Major Scott Lundy said.

Separately, the US-led coalition that handed over control of the south to Nato this week said its forces and Afghan troops had killed 25 Taliban "extremists" on Thursday in Helmand province, neighbouring Kandahar.

The rebels were killed after they attacked the security force with small-arms and rocket-propelled grenades during a coalition "cordon and search" mission in a village, it said in a statement.

The coalition, which has been in Afghanistan since helping to overthrow the Taliban regime in late 2001, is maintaining a counterterrorism force alongside Nato forces in the restive area.

However, bloodshed has spiked even by southern Afghanistan's grim standards since the official handover to Nato this week.

## Rumsfeld locks horns with US lawmakers

AFP, Washington

Combative US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has received what may have been his most scathing questioning yet on Capitol Hill, as lawmakers decried what they see as the Pentagon's botched handling of Iraq.

Rumsfeld Thursday appeared at a hearing of the Senate's Armed Services Committee where one of the least forgiving questioners was Democratic US Senator Hillary Clinton, a perennial critic, who lashed the defence secretary for a "record of incompetence."

"We hear a lot of happy talk and rosy scenarios, but because of the administration's strategic blunders and, frankly, the record of incompetence in executing, you are presiding over a failed policy," Clinton told Rumsfeld.

Rumsfeld answered that "history will make a judgment" about his

alleged misjudgments and missteps.

"Are there setbacks? Yes. Are there things that people can't anticipate? Yes. Does the enemy have a brain and continue to make adjustments on the ground, requiring our forces to continue to make adjustments? You bet. Is that going to continue to be the case? I think so," he said.

"Is this problem going to get solved in the near term about this long struggle against violent extremism?" asked Rumsfeld.

"No, I don't believe it is, I think it's going to take some time."

Another Democrat, Carl Levin

decried the rising sectarian violence, despite the heavy US military presence.

"Sectarian violence is not only on the rise, it has eclipsed the Sunni insurgency and the terrorism of al-Qaeda in Iraq, in terms of the toll it has taken and the threats to Iraq's

chances of stability," Levin said. The beleaguered defence secretary had tried to avoid appearing before Thursday's panel pleading a busy schedule, but gave in to a chorus of calls by Senate Democrats who insisted it was vitally important he appear to explain US policy in Iraq.

Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy was also critical of Rumsfeld's leadership.

"We've been in there now for 40 months and 13 days with the finest military that's ever been developed in basically rather a third-rate military situation," Kennedy said.

Rumsfeld told Kennedy that ultimately the sectarian violence raging across Iraq "is going to be dealt with by Iraqis, and it's going to be dealt with by Iraqi security forces as a part of the solution. But it's going to be dealt with through a reconciliation process, a political process."