

Tornado hits Dallas suburb: 7 killed

LANCASTER, Texas, Apr 26: Rescue workers searched flattened homes Tuesday for victims of a tornado that killed at least seven people in this Dallas suburb, reports AP.

The twister roared out of the stormy night sky Monday, ripping first through Desoto, and then neighbouring Lancaster.

"It hit at exactly 9:38 pm," said Barbara Montgomery of Lancaster. "That's when our clock, Big Ben, was broken."

About 20 people were treated at Midway Park Medical Centre for cuts and bruises. Lancaster Police chief Mac McGuire said at least seven people died.

Rescue workers searched the rubble for anyone who may have been trapped underneath. Bricks, shingles, iron lamp posts and utility lines littered the streets. Buildings left standing had broken windows, awnings and shutters.

"Our building is the only one with four walls still standing," said David Montgomery, owner of the Lancaster Opry, a concert hall on the town's Historic Square, where famed 1930s gangsters Bonnie Par-

ker and Clyde Barrow once robbed a bank.

The US and Texas flags were tattered but still flying at the Vietnam Memorial. The city of Lancaster flag was hanging from its pole by a thread in the suburb of 22,000 situated 12 miles (20 kms) south of Dallas.

Utility crews worked through the night to repair power and telephone lines. Utility crews cut gas service to buildings blown apart.

The tornado was part of a severe storm system that rumbled across the central part of the nation Monday.

A tornado ripped through Tallhna, Okla, damaging houses and injuring at least four people. At least 26 houses and trailer homes were reported destroyed in the town of 1,300 residents near the Arkansas state line.

The storm dropped baseball-size hail near The Ballpark in Arlington, Texas where the Texas Rangers were forced to postpone a game. Fans had to wade through several feet (a meter) of water that collected in the aisles at the bottom of the stadium.

NATO officers, UN commanders discuss plan for air strikes

Serb withdrawal from Gorazde not enough: Christopher

LONDON, Apr 26: Bosnian Serbs have begun to withdraw heavy weapons from around the Muslim enclave Gorazde but not enough to avert the threat of NATO air strikes, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said here today, reports AFP.

"Today will be an important day. There has been some movement, but not enough," Christopher said after meeting with British counterpart Douglas Hurd.

Christopher was to leave later today for Geneva and a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.

As he spoke, a four-sided working group began meeting here in search of long-term solutions to the Bosnian conflict, as a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation deadline approached for the Bosnian Serbs to withdraw from the Muslim enclave Gorazde.

Hurd said Monday there would be "no hesitation" in ordering air strikes if Serb

troops and weapons were not withdrawn beyond a 20 kilometre (12 mile) radius from the centre of the Muslim enclave by the deadline of 0001 GMT Wednesday.

AP from Brussels adds: With a deadline just hours away for Bosnian Serb withdrawal from the enclave of Gorazde, NATO's top military officers met Tuesday with UN commanders to assess the situation in the war-torn region.

"It looks promising at the moment," said Gen Klaus Naumann, Germany's senior military officer, of reports the Bosnian Serbs are complying with NATO's demand to withdraw heavy guns 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) by early Wednesday.

But Naumann added, "It's a fluid situation." Naumann and other military chiefs got a firsthand assessment of the situation from British Lt Gen Sir Michael Rose, the UN commander in Bosnia, and French Lt Gen Bertrand de

Lapresse, commander of the UN Protection Force in former Yugoslavia.

After the morning session, US Gen George Joulwan, commander of NATO's European forces, said the discussions were "very, very good." He did not elaborate.

"Also attending the two-day session was US Gen John Shalikashvili, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Officials said the military chiefs would focus much of their attention on the alliance's decision last Friday to commit its formidable air power to protecting civilians in the besieged Bosnian enclave of Gorazde.

In issuing a series of ultimatums last Friday, the allies warned the Bosnian Serbs to halt their murderous attacks on the Muslim town of Gorazde or face immediate air strikes.

They also demanded that the Serbs pull their forces three kilometers (1.9 miles) from the centre of town by

early Sunday and push their heavy guns even farther back by early Wednesday (0001 GMT).

Since then, the Serbs appeared to have withdrawn weapons from the three-kilometer (1.9 mile) area and there were signs they were moving arms back to meet Wednesday's deadline, said UN officials in Bosnia.

A NATO official, demanding anonymity, emphasized the deadline was firm. "We will go ahead (with air strikes) if there is not broad compliance shortly after the deadline," he said.

In addition to Bosnia, the military chiefs' agenda called for discussions on the new Partnership for Peace program, which allows former Warsaw Pact foes to take part for the first time in field exercises and other military activities. It does not extend full membership.

So far, 14 nations have enrolled in the program.



Female Spanish soldier Pilar Broncano (R), member of the Spanish UN contingent "Agrupacion Cordoba," hugs her boyfriend who came to see her off from Seville airport in Spain April 25 before Broncano leaves for Split in Croatia on a humanitarian aid mission. — AFP photo

BRIFFLY

Castro welcomes Chiluba in Havana: President Fidel Castro welcomed his Zambian counterpart Frederick Chiluba to Cuba on Monday at the start of a five-day visit which officials said would include talks on cooperation in areas such as the sugar industry, medicine and passport. Reuter reports from Havana.

A technical assistance agreement for Cuban technicians to build a sugar mill in Zambia is set to be signed during the visit, officials quoted by the Cuban news agency Prensa Latina said.

The central African country's president is also set to visit a sugar mill, as well as biotechnology and vaccine manufacturing plants in this Caribbean island nation.

Nicaragua's army chief to resign: General Humberto Ortega announced Monday that he would step down as Nicaragua's army chief on an unspecified date, AFP reports from Managua.

Ortega, the brother of former leftist Sandinista President Daniel Ortega, made President Violeta Chamorro the target of bitter criticism from political opponents.

She had argued that keeping Ortega at the helm of the military was a key part of political fence mending after the country's civil war, but then announced last year — without consulting Ortega — that he would be out of the post in 1994. Ortega said his resignation had been agreed upon with Chamorro.

Human rights team in Guatemala: A team of UN experts began a two-week fact-finding visit Monday to pave the way for a permanent United Nations presence to monitor a Human Rights accord. Reuter reports from Guatemala City.

The 10-member team will meet with government and military officials and leaders of church organisations, said mission head Argentine Leonardo Franco.

"This will allow us to make recommendations to the UN Secretary-General... on the most appropriate way to carry out verification and to support Human Rights institutions," Franco told reporters.

Vietnamese President in Jakarta: Vietnamese President Le Duc Anh arrived in Jakarta Tuesday for a four-day state visit to include talks with President Suharto and other officials, AP reports from Jakarta.

Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said Monday the possibility of Vietnam joining the Association of Southeast Asian nations will figure importantly in Anh's discussions in Jakarta.

Another likely topic, he said, is the repatriation of Vietnamese refugees from Indonesia's Galang island and the settlement of a dispute over territory in the South China Sea. Indonesia has set up a temporary camp for Indochinese refugees on Galang island, just south of Singapore.

Quake hits eastern Java: A strong earthquake jolted the eastern Java town of Malang in Indonesia yesterday but there were no immediate reports of casualties or damage. Meteorological Department officials said, AFP reports from Jakarta.

The tremor measuring 5.9 on the Richter scale jolted the region at 5:21 am (22:21 GMT) yesterday they said, pinpointing its epicentre in the Indian Ocean, 160 kilometres (99.2 miles) south of Malang.

Yesterday's tremor followed a milder earthquake which rattled the eastern Ruteng town of Nusa Tenggara at 6:16 pm (10:16 GMT) on Monday with a magnitude of 4.9 on the open-ended scale measuring from one to 10.

Iran seizes 8.3 tonnes of drugs: Iran said on Monday its police seized 8.3 tonnes of drugs and arrested 2,134 people on drug charges in the first month of the Iranian year started March 21. Reuter reports from Nicosia.

The haul was nearly 26 per cent more than that of the same month last year, the Iranian news agency IRNA said, quoting an official report. It included 7.3 tonnes of opium and smaller quantities of hashish, morphine and heroin.

More than 63 per cent of the drugs were seized in Sistan Va, Baluchistan province bordering the frontiers with Afghanistan and Pakistan, it said.

Plane carrying 10 people crashes in Indonesia

JAKARTA, Apr 26: A light plane carrying 10 people crashed in rough terrain in Indonesia's west Kalimantan province and it was not known if there were survivors, an executive for its Indonesian operators said today, reports Reuter.

The plane crashed on Monday near Nanga Pinoh, 290 km (175 miles) east of the provincial capital Pontianak, Bambang SA, operations systems manager for Dirgantara Air Service said.

Its too difficult to estimate if there are any survivors, we only know the position of the plane, he told Reuters.

Bambang said the plane came down after running into rough weather on a flight from Pontianak to Nanga Pinoh on the Indonesian half of Borneo island.



Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto (L) gives a dose of Polio drops to her daughter Bukhtawar April 26. Bhutto inaugurated the first National Polio Day in Pakistan by giving doses of Polio drops to children in a local school in Islamabad. — AFP photo

Israel, PLO achieve progress on two key security issues

CAIRO, Apr 26: Israeli and PLO negotiators achieved a breakthrough on two key security issues at talks here today as Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin indicated his readiness to reach a quick agreement to launch autonomy, reports AFP.

"We came to an agreement on two issues: the safe passage Jericho-Gaza and the crossing-points out of Jericho and Gaza," General Abdel Razzak Yahya, chief PLO negotiator at the talks on security matters, told reporters.

Yahya did not explain how the two sides had resolved their differences over the two

issues. Israel has been demanding powers to check goods and people travelling between the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho, which are some 100 kilometres (60 miles) apart and divided by Israeli territory.

Rabin told Israel radio from Moscow on Tuesday, "we do not have to settle all the outstanding differences, so long as Israel does not make prior commitments on those differences."

"On the other hand, it is impossible to put off until later questions relating to security,"

said the Prime Minister, who is on a four-day visit to Russia.

Among questions which could be delayed were the definition of an "international presence" in Gaza and Jericho as is called for under the September 13 declaration of principles for autonomy.

"It would be a shame to lose time over that," Rabin said, adding that certain economic problems could also be left out for the time being.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation is pressing Israel to wrap up the autonomy negotiations in Cairo and launch self-rule as soon as possible.

Yeltsin for closer ties with Israel

MOSCOW, Apr 26: Russian President Boris Yeltsin voiced hope for closer ties with Israel as he met Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for talks today at the Kremlin, Itar-Tass news agency said, reports AFP.

Yeltsin told reporters he was "glad" to host Rabin, the first Israeli premier to make a state visit to Russia, and said the time was ripe for Moscow and Tel Aviv to "actively develop bilateral relations," the agency said.

Rabin, on the third day of a four-day visit to Russia, was due to hold talks later today with Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and Defence Minister Pavel Grachev.

Tuanku Ja'afar sworn in as Malaysia's 10th King

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 26: Tuanku Ja'afar Abdul Rahman was sworn in today for a five year term as Malaysia's 10th King, and immediately warned that the country's environment should not be sacrificed to development, reports AFP.

Resplendent in golden traditional attire and a yellow headdress, Tuanku Ja'afar, the 71-year-old ruler of southern Negeri Sembilan state, also pledged to carry out his duties efficiently and in line with the federal constitution.

The ceremony, telecast live nationwide, was witnessed by Malaysian state rulers, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and cabinet ministers.

As he took oath, the 71-year-old Oxford-educated hereditary ruler of southern Negeri Sembilan state told Bernama news agency he wanted Malaysian factories to spend more money on cleaning up industrial wastes.

"Public appreciation of how precious the environment is has to be increased. I hope this is given the importance it deserves," Tuanku Ja'afar said in an interview with Bernama.

"The duty of every individual is to see that development is not carried out at the expense of destroying the forest or pollution rivers and the air," he said.

China, Kazakhstan sign border agreement

ALMA-ATA, Apr 26: Visiting Chinese Premier Li Peng and Kazakhstan President N A Nazarbayev signed a border agreement between the two countries here today, reports Xinhua.

After the signing ceremony, Li called the agreement "a historic document," which defines the over-1,700-kilometer long border between the two countries in a legal form.

This, he said, would serve to boost the development of the existing bilateral relations of friendship.

Nazarbayev said the agreement symbolizes a long-term good neighbourly relationship between the two countries.

He expected the Sino-Kazakhstan border to be one of peace and friendship.

Also signed were an agreement on China providing loans to Kazakhstan, notes to be exchanged on China presenting a batch of materials to Kazakhstan.

Ethiopian plane hijacker surrenders

SANAA, Apr 26: A hijacker seized an Ethiopian airliner on a flight from Saudi Arabia but surrendered at Yemen's Sanaa Airport and released the 156 passengers and crew unhurt, Yemeni officials said on Monday, reports Reuter.

The hijacker burst into the cockpit of the Ethiopian boeing 757 after it took off for Addis Ababa from the Saudi city of Jeddah, said a statement carried by Yemen's official Saba news agency.

The man, an Ethiopian named as Blaya Mashasha, demanded that the plane, which was carrying 148 passengers and eight crew, fly to London.

Russian Pacific Fleet officer shot dead

MOSCOW, Apr 26: An officer of Russia's Pacific Fleet was shot dead in an overnight attack on his military unit, the second attempt in a week to steal arms, Itar-Tass news agency said today, reports Reuter.

It quoted the naval press office in the fleet's home base of Vladivostok as saying four unidentified attackers got away after shooting two rounds at a duty officer.

A navy spokesman said they were apparently looking for light arms and managed to seize two pistols and some ammunition.

Battlefield shifts to polling booths in violence-scarred Natal

KWAMASHU (South Africa), Apr 26: After a decade as mortal enemies, rival Zulu factions in South Africa's violent Natal province are savouring the chance to test their strength with ballots rather than bullets, reports AP.

In the country's first all-race elections this week, Natal will be the battlefield for a head-to-head clash between the African National Congress and Zulu nationalist Inkatha Freedom Party.

Hostility and violence persist among the Zulus, who make up most of the eastern province's population, but many warriors have been transformed into zealous campaign workers.

Thabani Radebe, a 34-year-old ANC, "Comrade" fighting against Inkatha loyalists, once thought he wouldn't live long enough to see a free election. Yet there was Radebe, grin-

ning as he helped conduct a streetside voter-education class over the weekend for about 30 residents of Kwamashu, one of the largest black townships outside Durban, Natal's biggest city.

And there was Inkatha "warlord" Thomas Shabalala, in nearby Lindelani, wearing a T-shirt with peace doves on the front and telling European election monitors of his hopes for reconciliation.

"We need each other, no matter who wins," he said. "Somebody wins the election and they say, 'You, Shabalala, up against the wall for the firing squad' or 'You, Mandela, up against the wall. That mustn't happen.'"

The ANC is expected to win the national election easily, giving Nelson Mandela the presidency. But the race in Natal, which includes Inkatha leader Mangosuthu Buthelez's



Nomaza Paintin, niece of ANC leader Nelson Mandela, raises her fist as she becomes the first black person to vote in a South African general election April 26 in Wellington. — AFP photo

KwaZulu homeland, could be closer.

Some observers believe the combined power of Inkatha and the white-led National Party could hold the ANC to less than 50 per cent of the Natal regional assembly.

"It will be a hard-fought region, with every vote counting," said University of Natal political analyst Mervyn Frost. Thousands of people have died in violence linked to the ANC-Inkatha power struggle that began a decade ago. Rural, traditional Zulus tend to support Inkatha, while young, urban Zulus often back the ANC.

More than 400 blacks were killed in Natal from January through March, while Inkatha urged its followers to boycott the election.

But violence has abated since Buthelez — after winning assurance that the Zulu monarchy would be officially

recognised — announced last week that Inkatha would take part in the election.

"We are very happy that some of our demands were met," Shabalala said. "We proved to the world that we wanted to participate in the elections."

Security forces will be stretched thin trying to oversee all 1,500 polling stations election officials plan to set up in Natal. Shabalala said he hoped ANC and Inkatha supporters would go to separate stations.

"It's wise not to mix them," he said. "Some words may be exchanged in the queue and they'll start to fight."

Could the ANC and Inkatha work together after the election?

"Definitely, if a change of heart happens, if we do a lot of work at the grass-roots," Shabalala said.

Tamil rebels in Philippines to buy weapons

MANILA, Apr 26: The Philippines chief anti-crime body is checking intelligence reports that some Sri Lankan Tamil rebels have arrived in the country to buy weapons, an official said on Monday, reports Reuter.

The officer of the presidential anti-crime commission quoted the reports and saying that suspected rebels had entered the country as tourists and had visited the central Visayas and southern Mindanao regions to buy guns.

We are puzzled because they have superior firepower in Sri Lanka. We don't understand why they would want to buy firearms here, said the commission officer, who asked not to be identified.

The Tamils are fighting for a separate state in the north and east.