

The World

All 143 aboard Gulf Air plane killed in crash off Bahrain

Probe into Airbus crash begins as families identify victims

MANAMA, Aug 24 : Rescuer workers have recovered the bodies of all 143 passengers and crew from the Gulf Air plane which crashed into the Gulf off Bahrain, a Bahraini civil defence official said early today, reports AFP.

The Gulf Air Airbus A320, on a flight from Cairo, crashed into shallow waters off the Gulf as it was attempting to land in Bahrain Wednesday.

"We have pulled out the bodies of the 143 people who were on board the plane," Abdul-Rahman bin Rashid al-Khalifa, administration director of Bahrain's Civil Defence, told state television.

The rescuers, including frogmen, were aided by search-light-equipped helicopters and ships from the Bahrain-based US Fifth Fleet as they searched in the darkness for survivors among the debris from the plane.

They also recovered the "black box" flight data recorder from the wreckage, a Bahraini government official announced Thursday.

The search was continuing for the cockpit voice recorder which will also help investigators discover exactly what caused the crash.

The Airbus A320 on a flight from Cairo crashed in the Gulf off Bahrain with an engine on fire while making its third attempt to land, officials said.

The captain issued no distress signal before the plane went down, a senior transport ministry official said, adding that the airport remained open.

A Gulf Air official here said the passengers aboard the ill-fated airliner included 63 Egyptians, 34 Bahrainis, 12 Saudis, nine Palestinians, six from the United Arab Emirates, three Chinese, two Iranians, and one passenger each from Australia, Canada, Kuwait, Sudan, Oman and the United States.

The crew comprised the pilot from Bahrain, a Pole, an Egyptian, an Indian, one Filipino, one Moroccan, an Omani and another from Bahrain, officials said.

Twenty-six children aged ten years or under were among

those on board. The Bahraini authorities were organising for bereaved relatives to come to Bahrain later Thursday morning, to identify the bodies.

A special flight would bring in relatives of the 63 Egyptian victims of the crash, Abdul Rahman said.

Stunned relatives of those on board Flight GF072 gathered at Cairo airport, venting their grief or in some cases refusing to believe what had happened.

The scene in Cairo was reminiscent of the aftermath of last October's EgyptAir Flight 990 crash which left 80 Egyptians dead among 217 people who died when the Boeing 767 plunged into the Atlantic off the US coast.

"Nobody has given us any information," Marzuk Abdelatif Shaladi repeated as he cried.

The US State Department said a US diplomatic courier was aboard.

Meanwhile, experts began today to probe the crash of a Gulf Air Airbus A320 that crashed into the sea off Bahrain the previous night, killing all 143 people on board, a high-level company official said.

Overnight, searchers recovered the bodies of all 135 passengers and eight crew from Flight GF072 from Cairo to Bahrain, and the airplane's flight data recorder.

The second "black box", the cockpit voice recorder, was retrieved later.

"The two boxes have been found," Gulf Air vice-president Ali Almadhi said. "Over time, I am sure they will expose the conversation between the air traffic control and the cockpit."

"It is too early to ascertain what caused the crash," Almadhi said. "The investigation is ongoing and it will be some time until the results are published."

Calling it a "tragic event", he added: "The company is working in coordination with government officials to best cope with the situation."

Searchers continued Thursday to bring in debris from the aircraft and personal effects of the passengers to aid the crash investigation and identifying the dead.



Relatives of passengers killed aboard a Gulf Air flight, grieve at Cairo Airport late Wednesday.



Bahraini coast guards collect the bodies of a Gulf Air jet passengers north of Manama late Wednesday. A Gulf Air Airbus A-320 crashed into the sea while trying to land at Bahrain Manama airport with 135 passengers and eight crew aboard, killing them all. - AFP photo

Indian forces kill 6 foreign mercenaries in Kashmir

JAMMU, India, Aug 24: Indian security forces killed six foreign mercenaries in a gun battle in rebellion-torn Jammu and Kashmir, police said today, reports Reuters.

The militants belonged to the Jaish-e-Mohammad group which was recently launched by Massoud Azhar, a Pakistani Islamic cleric released by India in exchange for 155 hostages aboard a hijacked Indian Airlines plane last year.

Three policemen were wounded in the gunbattle which took place on Wednesday night in the border district of Poonch, some 256 km (160 miles) north of Jammu, the state's winter capital.

A large quantity of arms including rockets, rocket boosters and grenades were recovered from the dead militants, a police officer said.

Nearly a dozen militant groups are fighting Indian rule in Jammu and Kashmir, the country's only Muslim majority state in a battle that has left an estimated 30,000 people dead.

Yugoslav army blocks roads to Bosnia

PODGORICA, Yugoslavia, Aug 24 : The Yugoslav army has thrown up roadblocks on routes leading into Bosnia, stopping all vehicles and letting only pedestrians pass, Montenegrin state radio reported late Wednesday, reports AFP.

The barricades have been erected on roads leading from northwest Montenegro, the junior state in the Yugoslav federation with Serbia, and south-east Bosnia, otherwise known as Republika Srpska -- the Bosnian Serb-run half of Bosnia.

It was not immediately possible to confirm the information.

6 arrested, arms seized after killing in N Ireland

BELFAST, Aug 24 : Police arrested six men and seized firearms late on Wednesday night in the north of Belfast after a 21-year-old man was shot dead in the street, a Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) spokesman said.

Police made the arrests during a security operation in the Protestant bastion of Shankill Road.

Officers saw two cars acting suspiciously and chased the occupants for blocks, detaining the six men in a nearby street.

Follow-up searches by police in the area uncovered a number of firearms and ammunition, the RUC spokesman said.

Bomb blast outside Nepali minister's house, none hurt

KATHMANDU, Aug 24 : A bomb exploded near the residence of Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi and other places in Nepal late Wednesday, but no one was injured, police and newspapers said today, reports AFP.

Police said a small bomb exploded at about 7 pm just outside Joshi's residence and shattered a window pane.

Another blast occurred in Patan, south of Kathmandu, and near the Mahendra Police station in the capital.

More bombs went off elsewhere in eastern Nepal but no injuries were reported.

Observers blamed extreme-leftists for the explosions.

German woman presses Pak courts to put rapist in jail

ISLAMABAD, Aug 24 : A German woman who was raped in Pakistan earlier this month and arrested the man herself is now fighting another battle with the courts to put him in jail, an embassy spokeswoman said today, reports AFP.

The woman, in her late 20s, was hiking with three German friends in northern Pakistan when she was separated from the group and raped by a man she met along the trail, embassy press officer Elke Iqbal said.

The man fled across a glacier when his friends approached but the group tracked him down to a village where his relatives pleaded with them to leave him alone, the unidentified victim said in an interview with the News daily.

Libya defends mediation in hostage crisis

MANILA, Aug 24 : Libya has defended its mediating role in the Philippine hostage crisis, saying it was negotiating with Muslim extremists to free their 29 captives on a request from European governments, reports AFP.

"Actually, we don't need this," The Europeans need Libya, more than Libya needs Europe," said Rajab Azarouq, Libya's pointman in the negotiations with the Abu Sayyaf kidnappers holding the hostages in southern Jolo island.

"Libya has a good image. We don't care about the others. What they think about us. We are doing what we believe in," he said in an interview published in the Philippine Daily Inquirer Thursday.

Mori expects India to sign CTBT early

NEW DELHI, Aug 24 : Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori said today he expected India to move swiftly in signing up to the nuclear Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), reports AFP.

"I strongly expect India's early signature to the CTBT," Mori said, while justifying the sanctions imposed by Japan after India's nuclear tests in 1998.

Addressing a meeting of business leaders, Mori said India's accession to the CTBT would allow both countries to "take initiatives together for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation and further promote our amicable relations."

India, which says it will take a decision on the CTBT after first building a "political consensus," has criticised the treaty for discriminating between the nuclear haves and have-nots and for lacking a time-bound frame for global disarmament.

The nuclear issue, as well as the Japanese sanctions, were both raised during talks Mori held Wednesday with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Foreign Minister

Jaswant Singh.

At a subsequent press conference, however, Mori and Vajpayee chose to skirt global issues and highlight a new "global partnership" between the two countries, with an emphasis on greater economic cooperation.

Mori -- the first Japanese premier to visit India in 10 years -- called Thursday for Indian understanding of Japan's decision to freeze development assistance to New Delhi in the wake of the 1998 tests.

While recognising India's legitimate security concerns, Mori said the tests had come like a "bolt from the blue" to the Japanese people.

"I would like to ask you to understand this and the sentiment of Japanese people who solely experienced the disaster of atomic bombs in the world."

Prior to the sanctions, Japan was India's largest aid donor.

Deploping the continued violence in Kashmir and condemning "terrorist acts in any form," Mori stressed Japan's wish to see a resumption of dialogue between India and Pakistan.

"We must not abandon the efforts to resolve problems of any kind through dialogue," said the prime minister, who was in Pakistan prior to his arrival in India and held talks with military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

"I emphasised to General Musharraf the need... to create an environment conducive to the resumption of dialogue with India."

Relations between the South Asian rivals have been frozen since a bitter conflict along their disputed Kashmiri border last summer.

Mori's three-day visit has cemented the intention of both countries to put their nuclear differences aside in order to push forward bilateral relations.

The new "partnership for the 21st century" announced on Wednesday envisaged enhanced trade ties -- especially in the information technology sector -- and the launch of a regular security dialogue.

Mori left for a sightseeing trip to the Taj Mahal city of Agra Thursday afternoon, and was scheduled to leave India for Nepal on Friday.

Typhoon causes \$ 90 m damage to Taiwan

TAIPEI, Aug 24 : Taiwan's agricultural sector has suffered 2.78 billion Taiwan dollars (90.09 million US) of damage, after the strongest typhoon to hit Asia this year swept across the island, authorities said today, reports AFP.

Official figures suggested the agricultural sector was hit hardest by the "super typhoon," and authorities have agreed to grant subsidies to farms affected by the storms.

Local state television news showed Premier Tang Fei visiting a pomegranate farm in the eastern county of Hualien, where tonnes of pomegranates were destroyed.

Typhoon Bilis, packing center winds of up to 320 km (200 miles) an hour, hit the island overnight Tuesday, leaving 11

people dead, eight missing and 101 injured.

Total damages in agriculture, forestry, fishery and live stocks are estimated at 2.78 billion dollars," the Council of Agriculture said in a statement.

The eastern Hualien county suffered the biggest agricultural loss of 793 million dollars, followed by Taichung and Nantou counties in central Taiwan and Taitung county in the east," it said.

In Hualien county alone, damage to the agricultural sector amounted to about 900 million Taiwan dollars.

A total of 31,184 hectares (77,960 acres) of farm land across the island were destroyed by powerful winds and torrential rains brought by Bilis, it added.

500 become sick after eating adulterated food in Bhopal

BHOPAL, India, Aug 24: More than 500 people became sick in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh after eating food which authorities believe was adulterated.

District Collector SK Vashishtha told Reuters today about 550 people, mostly Hindu devotees, became sick in Bafargarh in Bhopal district, after they ate a dish made from flour.

"They took ill after consuming food prepared from a flour that was adulterated. We will know in a day or two what exactly went wrong," Vashishtha said.

A hospital official said the sick were overcome with pain.



Rescue people take a boat to help the local residents who are trapped in the flood waters in Tienliao, Kaohsiung county, in the southern part of Taiwan Wednesday after Typhoon Bilis crossed the island. Typhoon Bilis cut a deadly swathe of destruction across Taiwan killing at least 11 people, before roaring onto mainland China. - AFP photo

Nepal readies for Mori's visit

KATHMANDU, Aug 24 : Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori is set to arrive in Nepal for a six-hour visit Friday on the last leg of his four-nation tour of South Asia.

We attach a great importance to the Prime Minister's historic visit as the first Japanese head of government to ever step on Nepalese soil 44 years after the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two nations in 1956," Foreign Minister Chakra Prasad Bastola told AFP.

"Mori's visit will generate tremendous goodwill and help develop bilateral economic cooperation between us," Bastola said.

Mori is expected to seek Nepal's support in its bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council and other restructuring proposals for the world body, Nepalese foreign ministry officials said.

In return Japan is expected to support Nepal in its attempt to gain membership of the UN Social and Economic Council.

Bilateral aid, Nepal's Bhutanese refugee problem and the future of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) are other issues likely to figure during talks between Mori and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Bastola said.

SAARC, formed in 1984, groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Nepal is anxious to seek international support in securing the repatriation of the more than 100,000 Bhutanese of Nepalese descent who are languishing in refugee camps after fleeing Bhutan in 1990.

Kathmandu will also seek help for hydro-electric power generation, rural agricultural and irrigation projects, National Planning Commission vice chairman Prithvi Raj Ligal said.

"We will seek Japan's help to launch the Sunkoshi diversion to Kamala river (to the east) to irrigate several southeastern districts and the 48-megawatt Bheri river hydropower project (to the west) estimated to cost 280 million dollars," Ligal said.

Nepal's Maoists step up use of children in their bloody struggle

KATHMANDU, Aug 24 : Maoist guerrillas in Nepal are increasingly using children in their brutal campaign to overthrow the country's constitutional monarchy, human rights activists say, reports AFP.

"At least 30 per cent of the some 5,000-strong liberation army of the Maoist insurgents are children below 18," said Kapil Shrestha, a member of Nepal's recently formed Human Rights Commission.

Shrestha charged the insurgents with violating international human rights law by abducting and forcing children under the age of 18 to fight in their army.

He condemned the Maoists' terror tactics, including its

forceful closing of schools in remote northwestern districts.

"The Maoists are also extorting billions of rupees from businessmen, industrialists, schools, non-governmental organizations and village chiefs through intimidation," he said.

The Maoists have been waging a "people's war" since 1996 for a republican form of government in Nepal in place of the constitutional monarchy established in 1990.

More than 1,300 people have been killed since the start of the uprising.

Shrestha also criticised the Nepal Congress government for its internal squabbling and its failure to bring the insurgents to the negotiating table.

Richard wins US TV 'Survivor' contest, takes \$1m home

WASHINGTON, Aug 24 : Thirteen weeks of suspense for millions of US viewers ended late Wednesday when a jury of seven on the Survivor summer television blockbuster picked Richard Hatch to be the one million dollar winner, reports AFP.

An estimated 40 million viewers -- a whopping share of the US network television audience -- watched the final 13th episode of the show, which originally pitted two teams of contestants against each other.

Filed in March, the program showed contestants eating and grilling rats, swallowing bugs and holding their breath the longest, among other contests.

China detains 130 underground church men

BEIJING, Aug 24 : Chinese police have detained 130 members of an underground Protestant church, including three US citizens, a Hong Kong-based human rights organisation said today, reports AFP.

A police official in the village of Dawangzhuang, located in central Henan province, told AFP that local officers, aided by police from Xihua county, had interrogated about 100 people on Wednesday.

Those questioned by police all belonged to the China Fangcheng Church, one of several Protestant groups not recognized by the Beijing authorities, according to the Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy.

The center said the arrested included three American "missionaries," identified as Henry Chu, Patricia Lan and Sandee Lin, all from California.

An official at the US embassy in Beijing Thursday told AFP that so far he had received no information from the Chinese authorities on the case.

Japan, N Korea shelve row for next round of talks

OSAKA, Japan, Aug 24 : Japan and North Korea shelved acrimonious disputes today as they agreed to a new round of talks to overcome decades of hostility and set up diplomatic ties, reports AFP.

"We had a very serious exchange of views in order to hold constructive discussions for the next round," said a Japanese foreign ministry official after a morning session between delegates from both nations.

"We have more or less cleared a stage," he said.

The next talks after the current round in Japan were expected to be held in October, possibly in Beijing, officials said.

The two sides are divided over Pyongyang's demand for compensation for Japan's brutal 1910-1945 colonial rule of the Korean peninsula, and Tokyo's concerns about the alleged abductions of Japanese by North Korean agents.

An afternoon session was billed before the two countries

were to close their latest attempt at rapprochement, a drive revived in April after a break of seven-and-a-half years amid a flurry of North Korean diplomatic activity.

In June, a summit in Pyongyang between North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung created hope that five decades of enmity on the divided peninsula could be easing.

The communist nation, ravaged by a decade of natural disasters and famine since the Gold Avar ended, has begun opening up and won diplomatic recognition this year from nations including Australia, Canada and Italy.

But no breakthrough was expected in the talks between delegations led by North Korean special envoy Jong Thae-Hwa and Kojiro Takano of Japan, the foreign ministry official said.

"The atmosphere is quite friendly but they are sticking to the same stated positions," he said.

Both sides explained "basic positions" over Japan's liquidation of its past, the official added. "It is not that both sides presented new positions or ideas."

Propaganda-blasting vehicles from far-right Japanese groups followed the delegations as the talks' venue switched from a foreign ministry guest house in Tokyo Tuesday to a convention and recreation resort here.

Norwegian group in talks to raise Kursk's N-reactors

OSLO, Aug 24 : A Norwegian engineering group is in talks with Russian authorities over the possibility of raising the section of the sunken submarine Kursk that contains its nuclear reactors, the firm said today, reports AFP.

Global Tool Management is assessing the feasibility of separating the rear section of the flooded vessel which houses the two reactors with remote-controlled cutters, and then raising it onto a barge, said Harald Ramfjord, one of the company's directors.

"We think it would be fruitless to try to float the entire submarine to the surface, as it is damaged and full of water," Ramfjord said.

Zimbabwe's farm invasions inspire copycats in Zambia

LUSAKA, Aug 24 : Charles Chalwe lives in a small wooden shack in Lusaka's Kanyama township -- a filthy and overcrowded suburb in the western part of the city, reports AFP.

His house is among thousands just like it crammed on to tiny plots of land, in a township located opposite a large open space zoned for commercial farms.

Wealthy Zambian business leaders, politicians and foreign investors, who live elsewhere, own the farmland in the area known as Makeni.

Chalwe and his neighbors have lived in Kanyama for years, and more people move here every day, although the township has run out of room for new homes.

Two months ago, amid reports of land invasions in

neighboring Zimbabwe, squatters decided to move on to Makeni's farms.

"If our friends in Zimbabwe can do it, what should stop us from doing the same. It's (the land) we demanded that which belongs to us," Chalwe said.

He blamed the situation in Kanyama on politicians, whom he said had failed to build decent, low-cost housing.

Now there are squatter camps on two large farms in Makeni, full of makeshift shacks, with members of the ruling Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) building more each day.

With the government doing nothing to stop the invasions, the squatter movement has grown and spread to other parts of the city.



India's Lara Dutta (L), Miss Universe 2000, receives flowers from former Thai Miss Universe Apassara Hongsakul (R) during the fund raising fashion show for AIDS-patients on Wednesday. Dutta was on a week-long charity programme to raise awareness on HIV-AIDS and other health issues. - AFP photo