

International

Floods kill five in Japan, 100,000 evacuated

TOKYO, Sept 12: Typhoon-powered storms killed five people and forced 100,000 to evacuate today as floods engulfed homes, unleashed deadly landslides and halted production at Toyota Motor Co., reports AFP.

Waters reached the tip of signposts in one tree-lined avenue that was turned into a muddy-brown river in Nagoya, the main city of the worst-hit Aichi prefecture.

Firemen were shown on television using small metallic boats to evacuate families who sheltered under plastic sheets.

A total 765 army troops were sent in to help.

"The personnel are rescuing people trapped in houses, ferrying them over the water in boats and piling sandbags on riverbanks," said a spokesman for the Ground Self-Defence Forces.

Among the dead, 77-year-old Sumio Kurachi and his 72-year-old wife Miyoko were killed by a landslide that buried their home in Aichi prefecture's Komaki city.

"Mud and 20-metre trees buried their house," said Aichi prefecture police spokesman Hidekazu Horuchi.

A 53-year-old firefighter in Nagoya city, Kinji Kimura, was also drowned, Horuchi said.

A 49-year-old lawyer, Makoto Goto, was found dead after being buried in a mudslide while apparently walking along the road in Nagoya city. And in neighbouring Shizuoka, a nine-year-old girl, Sayo Masuda slipped into an open drain Monday and was swept by floodwaters into a pond, where she drowned.

Seven people were still missing, according to a written statement from the National Police Agency.

Toyota, which has its biggest plant in Nagoya, stopped output at 13 of its 15 plants across Japan as production lines were flooded and parts shipments delayed, said a spokesman at the firm's Tokyo headquarters.

Typhoon Saomai, packing winds of up to 162 kilometre-per-hour

was approaching the southern island of Okinawa, said the Meteorological Agency chief researcher Ryosuke Ichizawa.

"This continues to create a volatile air movement over Japan," he said.

All air and sea links with Okinawa were suspended. Japan Airlines, All Nippon Airways and Japan Air System cancelled 197 flights to and from the island group.

The typhoon, 70 kilometres east of Okinawa, was expected to land Tuesday evening, said Meteorological Agency official Yasuo Katagishi, warning of the danger of high tides and powerful winds.

"It is big and strong," he said.

Local authorities ordered about 250,000 residents to evacuate, said Munetoku Naito, a spokesman for Aichi prefecture.

But so far only 72,133 had actually moved, he added.

Another 11,138 had fled from the neighbouring prefecture of Mie and 19,849 in Gifu, officials said.

"I would like to extend my condolences to those that died and my sympathy to those suffering from the floods," Chief Cabinet Secretary Hidenao Nakagawa told a news conference.

"We will stay on alert," he added.

The water could be seen in Aichi prefecture ripping long gashes out of earthen embankments along the Shonai river. Another eight rivers also flooded in the prefecture, where 14,329 homes were inundated.

Power was cut off to about 28,000 homes in Aichi, Gifu and Nagano prefectures as facilities were flooded, said Chubu Electric Power spokesman Toshihiro Watarai.

Bullet train services to Nagoya were interrupted, delaying 52,000 people as of Monday, said a Japan Railway Tokaido spokesman. "Some passengers have been forced to wait for more than 18 hours on the trains."

A small tornado struck Tokyo, tearing a tin roof off a factory in the city and cutting off power to 800 homes, officials said.



A driving school is inundated with floodwaters as torrential rains hit the city of Nagoya, in central Japan, yesterday. Typhoon-powered storms killed five people and forced 100,000 to evacuate in central Japan as floods engulfed homes, tore up trees and unleashed deadly landslides.

-AFP photo

18 killed in Thai floods

BANGKOK, Sept 12: At least 18 people have been killed in the past one month by floods in northern and northeastern Thailand, officials said Tuesday, reports AP.

About 1.2 million people have been hit by the floods in 13 provinces, losing either homes, property, farms or livestock, said Phajon Mahantabany, an official in the Civil Defense Division.

He said 12 people were killed in six provinces in the northeast and six in Phetchabun in the north.

The Nation newspaper quoted older residents of Phetchabun province as saying that the rains are the worst they can remember in 20 years.

Thailand has been hit by three big storms since mid-August, including typhoon Wukong, which swept from Laos on Friday.

According to preliminary government estimates, the floods have caused damage worth 744 million baht (dhs 18.6 million) by inundating rice paddies and homes and drowning farm animals.

Peace process with Israel in crisis: Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Sept 12: The Palestinians said today that the peace process with Israel was in crisis and that they did not foresee any "serious negotiations" aimed at forging a peace accord, reports AFP.

It is apparent that the peace process is living in crisis due to the Israeli non-committal attitude towards the agreed issues and their refusal to implement UN Resolution 242, "senior negotiator Saeb Erekat said, referring to the resolution calling for Israel's withdrawal from territory it took in the 1967 war.

"Israel acts as if it is above the law," he told Voice of Palestine radio.

Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had announced at the weekend that negotiations would resume with Israel, but so far the two sides have not confirmed any date for formal high-level talks.

However, there have been lower-level contacts between

negotiators, Israel's Acting Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami said on Monday.

He hailed the Palestine Liberation Organisation Central Council decision Sunday to delay the declaration of statehood from the planned date of September 13 as breathing new life into peacemaking, but nevertheless said there was not "extensive hope" for an accord over the coming weeks.

Palestinian legislative council speaker and chief negotiator Ahmed Qorei said Israel was "wasting time."

"They played games of procrasinating, formulas and language and now they are avoiding the meetings that could help in closing the gaps. I think there will be some rounds of talks but not serious negotiations," he told the radio.

Qorei also rejected Israeli calls for the Palestinians to show "flexibility" on control over Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak denied Tuesday reports that Israel was prepared to accept giving sovereignty over the holy sites to an international body including the UN Security Council permanent members and the Jerusalem Committee of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

And it's holy sites, the key stumbling block in the negotiations that led to the collapse of the Camp David summit in July.

"President Arafat showed readiness to study a proposal that the holy sites, Islamic and Christian, come under Islamic jurisdiction with a Palestinian sovereign jurisdiction, and they rejected that," he said.

"We don't have the capability or the desire to be flexible regarding the holy sites: these areas are not only ours but also the property of the Islamic and Christian worlds," he said.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak denied Tuesday reports that Israel was prepared to accept giving sovereignty over the holy sites to an international body including the UN Security Council permanent members and the Jerusalem Committee of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

SRINAGAR, Sept 12: Suspected militants entered an army camp in India's northern Kashmir state and fought an overnight gunbattle with soldiers, police said Tuesday, reports AP.

The fighting began late Monday and ended Tuesday morning.

Details of casualties and the damage to the camp in Berwah, 40 kilometers (24 miles) northwest of Srinagar, were not known because the army had sealed the camp, said a police officer on condition of anonymity.

The militants, numbering between two and four, were members of a suicide squad, the officer said. It wasn't clear if they were dead or alive.

The army camp couldn't be reached by telephone.

A dozen militant groups are fighting to sever Kashmir from India. More than 26,000 people have been killed in the fighting that began in 1989.

India accuses neighboring Pakistan of backing the insurgency, a charge Pakistan denies.

Army camp attacked in Kashmir

JAKARTA, Sept 12: Former Indonesian president Suharto implicitly ordered the crackdown on the opposition Democracy Party of Indonesia (PDI) that led to mass riots here in 1996, a retired general said on Monday, reports AFP.

Suharto told his generals to stop a free speech forum at the PDI headquarters because it had developed into a "session to humiliate state officials," the daily Indonesian Observer quoted Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso as saying.

Based on this order, "TNI (the armed forces) officers then took the initiative to act in accordance with their respective responsibilities," Sutiyoso added, according to the Jakarta Post.

Sutiyoso, a retired three-star general who was Jakarta military garrison commander at the time of the crackdown, was speaking to reporters on Monday after being quizzed at national police headquarters on July 27, 1996 raid.

The governor was the first of several ranking police and military officials questioned over the incident, to publicly point directly to Suharto as the instigator.

The riots in central Jakarta that followed the raid left at least five people dead and 23 others missing, by official count.

Sutiyoso said the meeting at which Suharto gave

'Suharto ordered crackdown on opposition party in 1996'

the order to stop the forum took place at Suharto's Jakarta residence in the presence of himself, then military chief Feisal Tanjung, then police chief Hamid Nata, and two other senior generals, including the military's chief of socio political affairs Syarwan Hamid.

The free-speech forum was held by loyalists of then opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri to protest her ouster from the party leadership engineered by the Suharto government in June 1996. Megawati is now the country's vice president.

Sutiyoso, a lawyer, Colonel AB Setiawan, said the meeting at Suharto's residence was held on July 19, and it had discussed ways to stop the forum and "the security situation in Jakarta in general," the Observer reported.

According to Setiawan, the July 19 meeting was the only one to be attended by the former president, who ruled the country with an iron fist for 32 years.

Follow-up meetings were held at Hamid's residence, Setiawan said, adding they did not involve plans for the raid but only "how to socialise the PDI Medan congress."

The Medan PDI congress was held in June 1996 by a government-backed PDI splinter faction that ousted Megawati and installed the faction's leader Suryadi.

Govt planning tougher action against Filipino rebels

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines, Sept 12: The government is planning tougher actions against Muslim rebels after confirming they kidnapped three more people from a Malaysian diving resort and brought them to the southern Philippines, officials said today, reports AP.

"We need to stop this once and for all," said presidential Executive Secretary Ronald Zamora.

Zamora said the government must "develop support for what-

ever firm action it will take," suggesting a possible assault on Abu Sayyaf rebel strongholds on southern Jolo island.

Marines and four navy ships, including two landing craft, were on standby at a naval station in nearby Zamboanga city. A senior official said the ships were going to Jolo.

The government's resolve against the kidnappers was also toughened by reports that several female hostages had been raped

by the rebels.

Risto Vahanen of Finland, among four European hostages freed Saturday, said they had been powerless to help the raped women. "Some, a few, women there were treated in an inappropriate manner," he told Finnish MTV3, and answered "yes" when asked if they had been raped.

He said the raped women had been held in a room with other women, without names, so that the world would know what

Robot had done," referring to rebel leader Ghaleb "Robot" Andang.

Press secretary Ricardo Puno noted that several senators had called for a military attack on the rebels. Officials confirmed Tuesday that three Malaysians kidnapped Sunday from Malaysia's Pandan Island had been brought to Jolo, where the rebels are holding several other groups of hostages.

Asjada Abbu, a village chief in

Talipao on Jolo, said the three were being held on Mount Mahala by a rebel faction with just 11 followers. However, more than 300 armed men are now guarding the hostages, apparently in hopes of sharing in a large ransom, he said.

The abduction followed the release Saturday of the four Europeans the last foreigners to be freed from a group of 21 hostages taken in April from Malaysia's Sipadan island.

The abduction followed the release Saturday of the four Europeans the last foreigners to be freed from a group of 21 hostages taken in April from Malaysia's Sipadan island.

Although the European Union has since lifted restrictions, the United States has retained its ban. This has badly hurt operations by the air force and navy, the two services most dependent on US equipment.

"It's impossible to get them from America," Sutijito said late Monday as cited by the state Antara news agency. "I notice that Russia is most prepared to provide them."

Western nations, and particularly the United States, have long been Indonesia's principal suppliers of military equipment. But those countries slapped an embargo on weapons supplies to Jakarta in the aftermath of last year's destruction of East Timor.

Indonesia cut all military ties with Moscow after Suharto seized power.

Jakarta to buy military aircraft from Moscow

JAKARTA, Sept 12: In an effort to sidestep arms embargoes by its traditional suppliers in the West, Indonesia is considering buying Russian military aircraft for the first time since 1965, officials said today, reports AP.

Navy chief Adm. Achmad Sutijito said his service wanted four medium Mil-17 helicopters to deploy marines to the country's many troublespots.

"It's impossible to get them from America," Sutijito said late Monday as cited by the state Antara news agency. "I notice that Russia is most prepared to provide them."

Western nations, and particularly the United States, have long been Indonesia's principal suppliers of military equipment. But those countries slapped an embargo on weapons supplies to Jakarta in the aftermath of last year's destruction of East Timor.

Indonesia cut all military ties with Moscow after Suharto seized power.

N. Korean FM cancels UN visit

NEW YORK, Sept 12: North Korea's foreign minister has cancelled his attendance at the UN General Assembly, which puts off expected talks with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the State Department said, reports AP.

Department spokesman Richard Boucher said "unavoidable reasons" prompted Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun's cancellation, and it was not aimed at slowing an improving relationship with the United States. "We are still in touch with them on setting dates" for a meeting on North Korea's sale of missiles, Boucher said.

The postponement will not have "a negative effect" on improving relations with North Korea, the spokesman said.

American officials also confirmed that North Korea has withdrawn its objection to keeping 37,000 US troops south of the 38th parallel truce line, in place since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War.

"We are a sovereign country. We are free to buy from anywhere we wish," Sutijito said at a military ceremony in the port of Surabaya.

Col. Alexander Smirnov, Russia's military attaché in Jakarta, said the deal would represent the first time Indonesia has ordered Russian military equipment since an abortive communist coup in 1965 ushered in 32 years of right-wing dictatorship by former strongman Suharto.

Indonesia cut all military ties with Moscow after Suharto seized power.

"We are a sovereign country. We are free to buy from anywhere we wish," Sutijito said at a military ceremony in the port of Surabaya.

Col. Alexander Smirnov, Russia's military attaché in Jakarta, said the deal would represent the first time Indonesia has ordered Russian military equipment since an abortive communist coup in 1965 ushered in 32 years of right-wing dictatorship by former strongman Suharto.

Indonesia cut all military ties with Moscow after Suharto seized power.

"We are a sovereign country. We are free to buy from anywhere we wish," Sutijito said at a military ceremony in the port of Surabaya.

Col. Alexander Smirnov, Russia's military attaché in Jakarta, said the deal would represent the first time Indonesia has ordered Russian military equipment since an abortive communist coup in 1965 ushered in 32 years of right-wing dictatorship by former strongman Suharto.

Indonesia cut all military ties with Moscow after Suharto seized power.

"We are a sovereign country. We are free to buy from anywhere we wish," Sutijito said at a military ceremony in the port of Surabaya