

## US submarine collides with Japanese boat: 9 missing

AFP, Washington

Nine people remained missing late Friday, several hours after a US nuclear-powered naval submarine collided with a Japanese boat southeast of Honolulu, sinking the boat, US officials said.

Thirty-five people had been aboard the vessel, of whom 26 were rescued about an hour after the boat went down after Friday's collision, coast guard officials said.

A Japanese government spokesman said that the capsized boat was a training ship and school students were among those missing.

Coast guard spokeswoman Lauren Smith said that 12 people were taken to local hospitals for treatment. The extent of their injuries was unknown.

In Tokyo, officials with Japan's coast guard named the Japanese boat as the 499-tonne training ship Ehime Maru from a fisheries high school in Uwajima on the western Japan island of Shikoku.

The submarine, the USS Greenville, based in Pearl Harbour north of Honolulu, appeared to have suffered no damage, said Commander Greg Smith director of naval media operations at the Pentagon, who said there would be a full investigation into the incident.

Smith said the accident occurred at 1:45 p.m. Hawaii time (0545 BST), about 14 kilometres south of Diamond Head, on the southern coast of the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

Japan Broadcasting Corporation reported in Tokyo that the crew included 13 high school students, two teachers and 20 professional crew members who were trawling for tuna.

The submarine, which was on routine operations, "was surfacing when its stern apparently collided with a motor vessel," Smith said.

The cause of the collision was not known, but weather reports said winds at the time of the incident were between approximately 20

and 30 miles per hour.

The US Coastguard dispatched a helicopter to the scene "within minutes," he added.

There were initial reports of survivors from the boat floating on life rafts.

The submarine had remained on the surface and was assisting with rescue operations, officials said.

The Ehime Maru left Misaki port in Miura at the mouth of Tokyo Bay on January 10 and was scheduled to return home March 23, reports said.

The Japanese government has asked the US administration, through the US embassy in Tokyo, to do its best to rescue the missing crew members, a Japanese foreign ministry official said.

"First of all, we have to concentrate our efforts on saving lives. And then, we need to find out the cause of the accident and consult the US government over the matter," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda said.



PHOTO:AFP

This undated US Navy photo shows the Los Angeles-class attack submarine USS Greenville (SSN 772) based at Pearl Harbour. The Greenville hit a Japanese vessel sinking it on Friday, according to a Navy spokesman. The Japanese craft, believed to be a fishing boat, was carrying 25 crew members. The US Coast Guard said it had rescued all but nine of the crew, who have been reported missing. The collision occurred 14 kms off Diamond Head, south of the Hawaiian island of Oahu.

## A paradise for the rich and famous

AFP, Fisher Island, Florida

It is one of the most expensive, exotic and inaccessible places in the United States, this little island off Miami, a haven for celebrity millionaires.

Among those who have homes here are Julia Roberts, Sylvester Stallone, Brooke Shields, Andre Agassi, Boris Becker and his former wife Barbara, Pete Sampras, Gloria Estefan, Mariah Carey and superstar television talk show host Oprah Winfrey.

The 87-hectare (215-acre) tropical island has a mild climate, when it's not being lashed by hurricanes, as well as postcard-perfect beaches, a famous club, 18 tennis courts, a helicopter pad and a golf course.

But the real allure for Fisher Island residents is that the rich and famous are left alone. The island is closed to the public, including reporters and paparazzi. A discrete but strict control reigns on the little jetty near Miami Beach where a ferry regularly departs for the seven-minute journey to Fisher Island.

Only residents and their guests may board in their luxury vehicles. But upon arrival, the Jaguars, BMWs and Porsches are idle: "islanders" tool about in battery-powered golf carts. Exhaust and noise are not part of this world.

Some 550 families from 39 countries have second homes on the island, but only 100 live there full time.

Of those families 70 per cent are from United States, 20 per cent are Europeans, and 10 per cent are from South America, explains real estate agent Phyllis Winick.

Apartments -- "small" ones of 300 square meters (3229 square feet) and big ones of 800 square meters (8611 square feet) -- cost between 1.5 and six million

dollars. Single-family "villas" sell for up to seven million. It's some of the most expensive real estate in the United States, says Winick.

Fisher Island has just about everything: about fifty private security guards, a fire crew, a paramedic team and a small shopping centre.

"This is a paradise," says Dominique Kuhlman, who is French and one of the island's rare year-round residents. "I stayed when there was a hurricane warning."

She refers to her famous neighbours by their first names.

"You leave them alone, you say hello, that's it. I've travelled a lot and met so many people ..." adds Kuhlman, the former wife of the head of a multinational company, who dedicates her days to golf, the spa, and the beach.

Former president Bill Clinton came here often, to stay with friends. Tennis star Andre Agassi trained on the grass courts of Fisher Island, as did Steffi Graf. You might spot Spice Girl Melanie Brown here, or one of the members of the music group U2.

Fellow residents of Fisher Island won't bat an eye, says Sissy De Maria, a public relations officer for the island. Once or twice a year a boatload of Cubans or Haitians washes up on the beaches of Fisher Island, beaches whose sand has been imported from the Bahamas. Security guards immediately turn them over to US immigration officers.

The fleeting encounter with the Cuban or Haitian boat people is the only event that perturbs the serene and gilded routines of this wealthy paradise.

## Sharon prepared to meet Arafat

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon has said he intends to meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat but there is unlikely to be much on the negotiating table as the levels of violence rise again.

The hawkish Sharon said Friday that he planned to meet Arafat but signalled he would take a tough-line in any peace talks. He has said there will be no peace negotiations until the violence on the streets ends. On Friday it escalated, with one Palestinian dead and dozens injured.

The two leaders spoke by phone for the first time since the Likud leader's election victory over incumbent Prime Minister Ehud Barak Tuesday.

What is clear to all parties was that former peace proposals championed by former US President Bill Clinton are no longer on the table.

Sharon told the top-selling Israeli newspaper Yediot Aharonot that he doubted a comprehensive peace treaty was possible, considering the differences between the Israelis and Palestinians.

"I am in favour of a non-belligerence agreement, but without the current timetable," Sharon said.

However the new US administra-

tion of President George W. Bush showed that it was still engaged in the Middle East.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell announced he would make a whirlwind tour of the Middle East and the Persian Gulf at the end of the month, to explore options for an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal and promote continued containment of Iraq.

Powell confirmed stops in Egypt, Israel and the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, but a senior State Department official said later that one or two additional destinations may be added -- possibly Syria and Lebanon.

"The purpose of this trip will be to share views with friends in the region, especially in Israel and Gaza and the West Bank, to make an assessment of the situation," he told reporters in Washington.

A Palestinian boy died and 44 people were injured in clashes between the Israeli army and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, extending the four-month wave of violence that has left 397 people dead.

## France, Britain agree to tackle illegal immigration

AFP, Cahors, France

France and Britain have launched a joint initiative to fight the growing problem of illegal immigration with British officials to be posted at the Eurostar train terminal in Paris for the first time.

The deal reached at a summit in picturesque Cahors, southwestern France, is a boost to British Prime Minister Tony Blair as the issue of illegal immigration is looming ever larger on his domestic political agenda ahead of an expected general election in May.

Along with the British officials operating at Paris' Gare du Nord station, the two European neighbours agreed to set up a new inter-governmental body to co-ordinate security at the English Channel.

Speaking after a day of talks in this mediaeval town, Blair said the steps would make a significant difference in combating "one of the biggest issues facing not just Britain

but the whole of Europe".

"We have to find the right way to make sure we treat real asylum-seekers with dignity, but take action against the illegal trafficking in human beings," he said.

Britain, which says it has now the largest number of asylum-seekers in Europe, sought to make illegal immigration the centre-piece of the day of talks, demanding help from France to stem the flow via the main crossing-point at the port of Calais.

French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin said France had agreed to hasten legislation which would permit British immigration officials to check passengers at the Gare du Nord in Paris as they board the Eurostar train to London, and to designate the Paris to Calais leg of the journey as an international railway-route.

Britain says 400 would-be asylum seekers are arriving at London's Waterloo station on board Eurostar every month, many of whom have

avoided detection by claiming to be travelling only to Calais, then staying on the train as it enters the Channel tunnel.

"We can now stop and check passengers even if they are travelling only to Calais. That's a very big change," Blair said.

The inter-governmental body -- to be called the "Cross Channel Commission" -- will comprise six senior officials, with the task of improving the fight against "illegal traffic in goods and people," as well as enabling joint management of crises at Channel ports such as those caused by blocking French strikers.

The only irritation for Blair during his French visit were questions fired at him by the British press corps on the future of his friend and political ally Peter Mandelson who was forced to quit his cabinet post amid a passports scandal involving Indian business tycoons the Hinduja brothers.



PHOTO:AFP

Colombian President Andres Pastrana (L) and the leader of the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas, Manuel Marulanda, shake hands after signing a joint statement in Los Pozos, Colombia, on Friday to revive the peace process and resume talks on February 14. The 13-point document, signed in front of reporters came after more than 13 hours of talks over two days between the two men and included a "humanitarian agreement" to exchange imprisoned ill FARC prisoners for ailing police and military troops held hostage by the rebel group.

## Russia set to build N-reactor in Myanmar

AFP, Moscow

Russia will begin talks with Myanmar on building a nuclear reactor in the South Asian country for scientific purposes, a government spokesman said here Friday.

If Myanmar's authorities agree to the deal, Russia's nuclear energy ministry will present appropriate proposals to the Russian government, the spokesman was quoted by the Interfax news agency as saying.

The Myanmar junta is accused by the United States and other Western opponents of carrying out a string of human rights abuses, and crushing all political opposition.

However, Russian officials said earlier that Moscow considers Myanmar a promising partner in Asia and the Pacific region.

## Astronauts deliver lab to space station

AP, Cape Canaveral

Space shuttle Atlantis' astronauts made the most important delivery of their lives, bringing a \$1.4 billion science laboratory to the international space station.

"Here we come," commander Kenneth Cockrell called out Friday as he steered Atlantis to a flawless docking 220 miles (350 kilometers) above South Pacific.

The laboratory, considered the centerpiece of the space station and thus named Destiny, was to be installed by Cockrell and his crew on Saturday during the first of three planned spacewalks.

The hatches between shuttle Atlantis and space station Alpha swung open two hours after the linkup. But the antenna was obstructed, preventing the joyous gathering from being broadcast live.

Atlantis' five astronauts are the first visitors to the international space station in two months. Alpha commander Bill Shepherd and his two Russian crewmates moved into the space station at the beginning of November and welcomed another shuttle crew in December.

Shepherd and his crew accepted supplies and gifts from the shuttle astronauts, including a computer, cables for the laboratory, food, water, clothes and about 20 DVD movies. Among the presents from Shepherd's wife, Beth: a Valentine's Day card, a video of the puppy he gave her for Christmas and snickers candy bars.

## Landslides, floods kill 45 in Indonesia

AP, Jakarta

At least 45 people were killed in floods and landslides in West Java province after days of torrential rain, the official Antara news agency reported Saturday.

It quoted local officials as saying more than 5,600 families had been left homeless and thousands of hectares (acres) of rice fields had been ruined.

The worst-hit area was Lebak district, about 60 kilometers (37 miles) south of Jakarta, where a series of landslides killed 29 villagers.

"This is the first time that there have been landslides here. Nobody expected them," said Endang Dakuruni, a local official.

He said the bodies of all the victims had been recovered and buried.

Torrential rain lashed parts of the main island of Java this week causing extensive flooding.

Flash floods also hit the capital Jakarta, but cause little damage.

## US asks Taliban to close its office in New York

AFP, Washington

The United States has ordered the Taliban to close its New York office in line with sanctions which punish the Afghan rulers for harbouring Saudi terror suspect Osama bin Laden, officials said Friday.

The Taliban's representative in the United States, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, was told to comply with the sanctions on Thursday during a State Department meeting, spokesman Richard Boucher said.

"Among these steps is the requirement to close any Taliban office in the United States," said Boucher.

"That means that the Taliban will no longer be able to maintain their office in New York."

The fundamentalist Taliban must satisfy requirements of United Nations resolution 1333, passed in December, which boosted sanctions against the Taliban following its refusal to hand over bin Laden.

Also included in the package was a tightened ban on flights from

Afghanistan, an arms embargo and a provision freezing the assets of both the Taliban and bin Laden.

The UN reiterated a demand for the Taliban to hand over bin Laden, the Saudi dissident and billionaire indicted in the United States for his alleged role in bombings of US embassies in East Africa in 1998.

The Taliban envoy had asked for the meeting with acting Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Alan Eastham to express the hope that US-Taliban relations would improve under President George W. Bush, a senior State Department official said.

Mujahid delivered a letter from the Taliban to Secretary of State Colin Powell which officials said detailed what the militia views as injustices perpetrated against it by the previous US administration.

The official said the closure of the office would not impact upon that process, and that an investigation into Mujahid's visa status would take place.