

35 cases of dengue fever in Hawaii

AP, Honolulu

Federal health officials have confirmed a total of 35 cases of dengue fever in Hawaii, including the first to occur on an island other than Maui, state Health Director Bruce Anderson reported Monday.

However, in the single confirmed case on Kauai, there is evidence that the patient had recently traveled to the east Maui area where most of the confirmed cases have occurred, he said.

Dr Paul Effler, chief of the Department of Health's Epidemiology Section, said there were 127 cases of flu-like symptoms, consistent with dengue fever, under investigation on several islands.

The virus in other parts of the world is typically spread by the Aedes aegypti, a day-biting mosquito that feeds on humans, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

UN human rights envoy in Yangon

AFP, Yangon

The United Nations' human rights envoy Paulo Sergio Pinheiro arrived here Tuesday for a visit of nearly two weeks to Myanmar, a military-run country which is accused of extensive rights violations.

A UN official in Yangon confirmed that Pinheiro had begun the mission which will run until October 20. But he declined to reveal details of his schedule, which is being kept under tight wraps.

Pinheiro is visiting Myanmar at a time when year-long talks between the junta and the democratic opposition have eased the atmosphere in Yangon and raised hopes that political reforms may be on the horizon.

Hurricane makes landfall in Belize: 6 killed

AFP, Guatemala City

At least six people were dead Tuesday as Hurricane Iris swept across the Caribbean and touched down in Belize, causing material damage as well with winds up to 130 kilometres per hour (80 miles per hour).

Local radio reported at least six passengers on tourist boat cruises were killed in the high winds and crashing waves that accompanied the Category Four hurricane, the strongest storm to hit the Caribbean this season.

Authorities have yet to confirm the deaths, but a radio report said the Wade Dancer, carrying 30 people, lost five of its passengers. Aboard the Vendora, one person was killed after the boat set sail from the Big Crik port in the southern district of Independence.

Belize journalists also reported that gusts of winds blew so fiercely that roofs were lifted clear off homes in Belize, where 80,000 of the country's 300,000 residents were evacuated.

Lankan ruling party MP defects

AFP, Colombo

A Sri Lankan ruling party MP Tuesday defected to the opposition as the government headed for a test of its strength, parliamentary officials said.

Legislator Bandula Gunawardena told parliament that he could no longer work with President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance as the minority government had no moral right to rule.

Gunawardena crossed the floor of the House and sat with the opposition amid loud cheering from opposition ranks and angry protests from government legislators.

The development was a serious blow to Kumaratunga's government which is set to face a vote of no-confidence on Thursday.

Milan plane crash toll rises to 118

AFP, Milan

At least 118 people were killed at Milan's Linate airport on Monday in a runway collision between a Scandinavian Airlines SAS jet preparing for take-off and a small Cessna plane preparing for a demonstration flight.

The crash was Italy's worst air disaster in nearly 30 years.

The jet was approaching take-off speed when it hit the Cessna in heavy fog. It ploughed into an airport baggage hangar, killing four airport ground staff, before splitting in two and bursting into flames, officials said.

Fears grow for millions of Afghan refugees

AFP, Islamabad

Fears grew for hundreds of thousands of displaced Afghans Tuesday with US food drops the only supplies entering the country, as aid agencies reported a growing tide of refugees heading for Pakistan.

Relief agencies said Tuesday they had stopped deliveries into Afghanistan because of security concerns following the US-led military assault on the country's ruling Taliban regime.

As the aid supplies built up on the borders of Afghanistan's neighbours, US officials said their air drops were continuing with C-17s scheduled to drop another 37,000 high protein food rations.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) spokesman Gordon Weiss said a 42-truck convoy full of relief materials and food was stranded in the western Pakistani city of Quetta waiting to go to the southern Afghan city of Kandahar.

He said there was also a smaller convoy stranded at Dogharum, in Iran, which was supposed to reach the western Afghan city of Herat.

"We are observing the situation and we'll decide when it's best to enter," Weiss said.

"We will send in supplies whenever we can but it depends on the security situation."

The United Nations World Food Program (WFP), which was also forced to cancel food deliveries inside Afghanistan, said it had enough food stocks already in the country to help hungry Afghans in the short term.

WFP food convoys that were already on the road in Afghanistan before the military assault started are expected to deliver more than 10,000 tonnes of food over the next few days.

However, WFP spokesman Khaled Mansour said this was not enough and the organisation was desperately hoping to be able to get more food into Afghanistan as soon as possible.

The deteriorating food situation came as UN spokeswoman Stephanie Bunker said there were reports of refugees approaching Pakistan from the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, which has been one of the targets of the military strikes.

"We have nothing concrete but we have heard there are people on the move from Jalalabad towards the border," Bunker said.

There were further reports of 1,000 refugees waiting on the Afghan side of the border near Pakistan's western border town of Chaman, well below the 10,000 to 20,000 believed to have camped there two weeks ago.

The reports indicate some potential refugees had returned to their homes as it became clear that US-led forces were not targeting civilian areas of Afghanistan's cities.

But the United Nations is still preparing for as many as 1.5 million Afghan refugees to pour out of the country, mostly into Pakistan.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf said Monday that the frontier would remain shut and stressed his country was not capable of absorbing the refugees.

US faces uphill battle to keep coalition intact

AFP, Washington

Washington has managed to garner unprecedented support for its military strikes on Afghanistan, but analysts believe it will face a tough task in keeping that global coalition together.

The first wave of strikes had the explicit or tacit support of most of the world's governments, though many also expressed reservations amid concern the attacks could kill innocent civilians and trigger a backlash in the Muslim world.

"So far so good, but its very early, and this will be like sand on the beach, constantly shifting," said Jon Wolfstahl, defence expert at the Carnegie Foundation in Washington.

"The administration will need to keep working, calling, negotiating and constantly assessing the attitude of different alliance members, particularly within the Islamic and Arab world," he said.

A flurry of activity at the State Department clearly reflected the determination to keep up the diplomatic pressure.

Secretary of State Colin Powell made no fewer than 14 telephone calls Sunday to European, Asian and Middle Eastern leaders, before the attacks or just after they started.

This week, Powell is set to travel to India and Pakistan two countries that are key not only to the current operations but also to longer term regional stability.

But the most sensitive region for the continuation of the US-led campaign remains the Middle East, where the strikes on Afghanistan could be viewed as an aggression against fellow Muslims by a western power.

The strategic value of the Middle East, both at the military and political level, led US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to make a whirlwind tour last week, visiting some US allies in the region -- Egypt, Saudi

Arabia and Oman.

"In this tense climate, it is difficult for countries in that region to publicly support an attack against a Muslim country," even if several of them gave their tacit backing to the military action, said Mary-Jane Deeb, a Middle East expert at the American University.

In a video recording released Sunday, Afghan-based Osama bin Laden, the chief suspect in the September 11 terrorist attacks, issued strong threats against the United States.

Deeb said those threats also indirectly affected governments in the Middle East who support the military strikes.

One of the conditions for continued support from the Middle East is that strikes be strictly aimed at military or terrorist targets within Afghanistan, the analyst said.

"If there are many victims, that would of course affect the coalition," she said.

India likely to get new defence minister

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is likely to name a new defence minister when he reshuffles his cabinet this month, a report said Tuesday.

"With the US launching an attack on Afghanistan and India putting its defence forces on alert the prime minister is likely to reshuffle his cabinet on October 17 and get a full-time defence minister," said the Asian Age newspaper said.

At the moment Jaswant Singh holds both the foreign and defence portfolios. He took over the defence job in March this year after then minister George Fernandes was forced to resign following a bribery scandal.

Singh is comfortable wearing both hats but several members of Vajpayee's government have voiced their reservations, the newspaper said.

"There is a feeling in government that with the international scenario worsening Mr Jaswant Singh might not be able to give enough time and energy to the defence ministry," said a senior leader of the ruling BJP party.



Humanitarian aid for Afghan refugees are unloaded from a Japanese air force cargo plane at the Chaklala airbase in Islamabad on Tuesday. The relief goods flown by six C-130 planes of the Japanese Air Self Defence Forces are part of the Japanese government assistance to the UNHCR for the international humanitarian relief operations for the Afghan refugees. The shipment consists of tents, blankets, water tanks and sleeping mats.

Muslim leaders warn US against consequences

AFP, Los Angeles

Leaders of the local Muslim community warned the US government Monday it risked turning the world Islamic community against it, if air strikes against Afghanistan resulted in many civilian casualties.

"If it's limited to the extremists, to the infrastructure of the al-Qaeda network, it's one thing," Salam Al-Marayati, national director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council told reporters here.

"But once we start seeing a rise in casualties in civilians, then I think there's a concern that we're going to be making more enemies in this campaign," he added.

Al-Marayati cautioned the government against using one armed Afghan faction against the other.

"These differences between Afghan groups should be resolved on the political table, not in the battlefield," he said. "Because the battlefields are where the warlords like Osama bin Laden become the instrumental factor in terms of who

gets power in Afghanistan."

Khalil Momand of the Islamic Shura Council of Southern California said he believed a return of Afghanistan of deposed king Mohammed Zahir Shah "could be a starter" in bringing about national reconciliation.

Meanwhile, the US-led military strikes on Afghanistan may have finally given America's promised "war on terrorism," a recognisable shape, and gone some way to assuaging the national desire for redress for the attacks of September 11.

But in Muslim communities across the United States, the military onslaught has merely ratcheted up anxiety as many agonise over the fate of Afghan civilians caught up in the crossfire.

"I'm very worried about the safety of innocent people in Afghanistan," said Imam Hassan Qazwini, a religious leader at Michigan's oldest mosque, the Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, suburban Detroit.

"The Afghans should not be held responsible for the acts of the Taliban and bin Laden," argued Qazwini.

The first wave of US and British air strikes on Afghanistan killed 20 people, "including women, children and the elderly," officials from the country's hard-line Islamic regime, the Taliban, said Sunday.

And many here fear that figure will rise as the United States and Britain continue to pound targets in Afghanistan in retaliation for the September 11 attacks that left more than 5,000 people dead.

And while few Muslims dispute the need to bring the perpetrators to justice, many are loath to see the war-weary and battered population of Afghanistan victimised in the process.

"They don't deserve to be bombed because there are some terrorists hiding in their country," said Imam Omar Shahin, leader of the Islamic Center of Tucson, Arizona.



Afghan refugees along with other residents of the area chant slogans against Pakistan and the US in Kala Abdullah, some 45 km from Pakistan's southwestern city of Quetta on Tuesday. Hundreds of protesters chanted slogans against Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf for allowing the US to use air space in their military strikes against Afghanistan. At least three people have been killed in a fresh wave of violence in Quetta on Tuesday and adjoining areas in retaliation of the US-led air strikes on Afghanistan.

Pak serial killer 'commits suicide'

LAHORE, BBC

Convicted Pakistani serial killer Javed Iqbal is reported to have committed suicide in prison.

Iqbal and one of his two accomplices killed themselves by taking poison, according to an official at the jail in the city of Lahore where he was imprisoned.

Iqbal was sentenced to death last March by a Lahore court for killing 100 teenage boys.

The case was believed to be the worst of its kind in Pakistan's history. However, the death sentence proved almost as controversial as the judge ordered Iqbal to be strangled and then cut into pieces.

The government moved to stem widespread criticism of the judge's decision by saying it would not be implemented.

Iqbal's lawyers also launched an appeal against the death sentence.

Atrocities in Croatia War crimes tribunal indicts Milosevic

AFP, The Hague

The UN war crimes tribunal has indicted former Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic for atrocities committed during the 1991-1995 war in Croatia, a spokeswoman announced Tuesday.

Florence Hartmann said the indictment, the second handed down against Milosevic, charged the one-time Yugoslav strongman with war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the bloody war.

Milosevic, detained here since June, is already on trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in Kosovo, the majority ethnic Albanian province of Serbia.

Carla del Ponte, the chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), is also working on a third indictment for genocide, the most serious war crime, committed during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia.

Del Ponte announced in September that she had signed the Croatia indictment against Milosevic, but it only became formal after being confirmed by one of the tribunal's judges.

Initially she planned for proceed with the Croatia and Bosnia indictments simultaneously, but later decided to pursue investigations of the Bosnia charges further to solidify the case against Milosevic.

Investigators for the war crimes tribunal have spent several years looking at Milosevic's role in atrocities carried out by Serb forces in Bosnia and Croatia.

The long awaited indictments for Croatia and Bosnia have been difficult to establish.

Unlike the Serb crackdown in Kosovo, where Milosevic was officially at the head of the operations, the chain of command in the two former republics is murky.

Syria elected to UNSC

AFP, United Nations

For the first time in more than 30 years, Syria, a country listed by Washington as a state sponsor of terrorism, was elected Monday to the Security Council as a non-permanent member for a two-year term.

Syria, elected by members of the General Assembly in a secret ballot, was the sole candidate for the one Asian group seat that becomes vacant on December 31.

The Security Council, the only UN body that can approve the use of force, is made up of 10 non-permanent members, with no veto power, and five permanent members with veto power.

Syria won 160 votes on the General Assembly which has 189 voting members.

The United States said the election of Syria would not change US policy towards Damascus.

"The United States will continue to express our concerns regarding terrorism with the Syrian government," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said in a statement.

"The United States will also continue to expect Syria to meet its obligation to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, to fulfil all Security Council resolutions and

to contribute to international peace and security, responsibilities that are only increased by its membership on the Security Council," he said.

But Syria's new role does not sit well with some members of the US Congress and leading Jewish organisations.

In a statement made public last week, Democratic Congressman Tom Lantos said Syria's election to the Security Council "would be an outrage, making a mockery of the Council's recent counter-terrorism resolutions."

Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League called Syria's election "both ironic and sad."

"With Syria now sitting on its highest body, the UN's commitment to fighting terrorism must be questioned," Foxman stressed.

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations said the election "undermines the credibility of the Security Council and the United Nations."

Although Washington maintains diplomatic relations with Damascus, it has long accused Syria of sponsoring terrorism with its support for Lebanon's Hezbollah militia and other groups opposed to the Middle East peace process.

'US strikes won't succeed'

AP, Hanoi

One of Vietnam's leading wartime generals warned that strikes by US and British forces against Afghanistan will not subdue the Taliban or Osama bin Laden and that civilians will suffer the brunt of the attacks, state-controlled media reported Tuesday.

"I support the fight against terror, but not by any means, particularly resorting to war, because it is the civilians who will suffer most," Gen. Van Tien Dung told Thanh Nin (youth) newspaper in an interview.

Dung was the commander of North Vietnamese forces that overran Saigon in 1975, defeating the US-backed South Vietnamese government and ending the decade-long Vietnam War.

Responding to a question of whether the US and its allies could subdue the Taliban and bin Laden with military strength, Dung said, "I think they will not."

The former defense minister said the Muslims will launch a holy war against the United States everywhere and "the war will not extinguish the hatred, but only fuel the hatred. The hatred would be deeper and the revenge would be fiercer."



Anti-war demonstrator protest in front of the White House on Monday. Some 150 protesters marched against the US-led military strikes on Afghanistan.

Security for Bal Thackeray tightened

AFP, Bombay

Indian police have stepped up security for the leader of a hardline Hindu group because of fears that he could be targeted by Islamic militants, police said Tuesday.

Bombay-based Bal Thackeray, leader of the militant Shiv Sena, has been detailed additional security following the US-led attacks on Afghanistan.

The outspoken Thackeray once said that Muslims should be deprived of their right to vote.

The Shiv Sena party is the third largest partner in Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's federal coalition government.

Security at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) and the US consulate in Bombay has also been tightened.

"We have beefed up security for politicians such as Thackeray and (the) chief minister. Apart from BARC, security at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and the police commissionerate has also been tightened," a senior police official said.