

Rescuers hunt for survivors of Tanzania train crash

AFP, Dar Es Salaam

Rescue workers in Tanzania continued Tuesday to hunt for survivors in the mangled wreckage of a passenger train that collided with a goods train near the central city of Dodoma, killing at least 200 people.

"The toll is now 200. It could rise because some of the bodies were trapped in coaches," Dodoma Regional Medical Officer John Mtimba, who is in charge of the rescue effort, told AFP.

With Dodoma's hospital morgue only equipped to hold 10 bodies, the city's sports stadium has been transformed into a makeshift morgue where bodies recovered from the deadly train crash were laid out under tents, awaiting identification, Mtimba said.

Weather favours Arizona firefighters

AP, Show Low

In a sign of progress against one of the worst wildfires ever to burn in the West, firefighters took advantage of calmer, cooler weather to slow the blaze as it crept within a half-mile of this mountain town.

The improved weather on Monday allowed fire crews to strengthen and complete two fire lines, then burn the area between them to create a blackened buffer zone to protect Show Low, a town of 7,700 in eastern Arizona.

"We're back to fighting this fire," fire spokesman Jim Paxson said. "It's been beating us up for a week, and we're back to fighting this monster."

The 330,000-acre fire, the largest in the state's history, has destroyed at least 375 homes in the White Mountains. Embers fell as far away as three miles from the fire.

Female aid workers evacuated

AFP, Kabul

Foreign female aid workers have been evacuated from the volatile northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif following a series of attacks on aid staff, including a gang-rape, a UN official said Tuesday.

As tensions remained high around the warlord-ruled city, foreign aid groups were still considering suspending relief programs, UN spokesman Manoel de Silva e Almeida warned.

"The situation in the region...is tense still," Almeida told a briefing in the Afghan capital.

The UN warned on June 15 that aid work in the north risked being halted unless local authorities acted to ensure greater security for relief workers after a spate of attacks.

Rocket attack on US forces in Afghanistan

AFP, Bagram Air Base

US special forces have come under separate mortar and rocket attacks in eastern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border, but none were injured, a coalition spokesman said Tuesday.

F-18 fighter jets flew in to cover US troops who were attacked by mortars in Kunar province, dropping bombs on the area from where the attack came, Colonel Roger King told a briefing here.

"US special operations forces in Kunar province came under enemy mortar fire at 2030 last night (Monday)," King said at this coalition air base north of the capital Kabul.

"They returned fire with their own mortars... saw enemy forces and called in close air support."

Quake rocks Iran again

AFP, Tehran

An earthquake measuring 4.0 degrees on the open-ended Richter scale shook Iran's already quake-stricken province of Qazvin early Tuesday, the state IRNA news agency reported.

The earthquake, which occurred shortly after midnight, hit the southern parts of Qazvin city, IRNA said, adding that there were no reports yet of damage.

Qazvin was hit by an earthquake measuring 6.3 degrees on the open-ended Richter scale Saturday, leaving 229 people dead and 1,300 others injured.

About 9,500 homes and buildings were destroyed, mainly villages around the town of Avaj in the south of the province, according to one official.

Iranian officials have put the number of homeless at 12,000, but the United Nations refugee agency has said as many as 80,000 people are in need of tents.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian youths look at the bodies of six men covered in the green flag of the militant Islamic group Hamas prior to their funeral procession at the Al-Awsa Mosque in the southern town of Rafah in the Gaza Strip on Monday. Two cars travelling near the town were hit by missiles fired from two Israeli helicopters killing the six men, two of them senior militants from Hamas.

Pakistan must keep pledges on Kashmir infiltration: India

REUTERS, New Delhi

India told Pakistan on Monday it must make good on its pledge to stop cross-border militancy after a U.S. magazine quoted its military leader as saying he could not promise a permanent halt.

These comments are "verbal calisthenics" by General Pervez Musharraf, Indian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Nirupama Rao told reporters. "Pakistan has committed itself to fighting terrorism. This is an unambiguous and clear commitment."

Nuclear-capable India and Pakistan recently came close to all-out war over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir. Tensions eased following intense U.S.-led diplomatic efforts but India has refused to pull its troops back from the border until it says it sees a permanent halt to militant infiltration.

Both countries, which have been at war with each other three times -- twice over Kashmir -- have massed

a million men along the border since a December attack on the Indian parliament that New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-backed militants.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who led the recent peacemaking drive, telephoned Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh on Monday to discuss the situation in the region, Rao added.

President Musharraf was quoted in the July 1 edition of the U.S. magazine Newsweek as saying he never said he would permanently end infiltration by Islamic militants fighting New Delhi's rule in Indian Kashmir.

"I've told President (George W.) Bush nothing is happening across the Line of Control (LoC)...I'm not going to give you an assurance that for years nothing will happen," he told Newsweek. The LoC is a cease-fire line dividing the Indian and Pakistani armies in Kashmir.

Musharraf also was quoted as saying he "didn't talk about" dismantling militant training camps in Pakistani Kashmir when U.S.

Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage made a peace mission to South Asia recently.

India has said it wants Islamabad to close down training camps for Kashmiri militants in Pakistan-administered Kashmir before holding talks with Pakistan over the divided region.

Rao said Musharraf's commitments to end infiltration "have been conveyed to us at the highest level during the visits of Armitage and (U.S. Defence Secretary Donald) Rumsfeld."

Musharraf had to "end the infrastructure of terrorism -- to pull the plumbing out," she said, referring to the camps.

Defence Minister George Fernandes said last week infiltration had nearly ended but Rao said it would still take some time to see if there was a definite trend, noting that July was traditionally a month when militant incursions were high.

Bush speech exalts Israelis, angers Palestinians

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli officials welcomed US President George W. Bush's Middle East strategy laid out Monday, but Palestinians angrily rejected his clear call for dumping Yasser Arafat as crucial to peace efforts.

The long-awaited speech by the US leader also drew a harsh reaction from the militant Palestinian group Hamas, which dismissed it as tilted toward Israel and vowed to continue its campaign of suicide bombings.

Bush coupled creation of a Palestinian state with provisional borders to sweeping political and security reforms by the Palestinians, including a move to replace the 72-year-old Arafat.

"I cannot find President Bush's statement acceptable," said chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat.

"President Arafat is the leader of the Palestinian people. He is the president of the Palestinian people," Erakat told CNN. "The Palestinian leaders do not come from Washington."

"The real issue is we need to specify a roadmap, as the president says, to end the (Israeli) occupation" of Palestinian territories, he said.

But the Israelis, who have been pushing Washington for months to take Arafat out of the Middle East equation, were clearly delighted by Bush's call for "a new and different Palestinian leadership."

Dore Gold, a senior adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, told CNN that "President Bush has established a clear standard" for moving forward to end the suicide attacks and resolve the nearly 21-month-old conflict.

Defence Minister Binyamin Ben Eliezer called the Bush speech "an

historic step that offers a security, political and economic horizon for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."

Several Israeli ministers also expressed their satisfaction.

Danny Naveh, minister without portfolio from Sharon's right-wing Likud Party, said it "marks the end of the era of Yasser Arafat and constitutes a victory for Israel."

The council which oversees the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip also praised the speech, saying Bush had "ordered the expulsion of Yasser Arafat and the eradication of terrorism."

But Sharon's office was more circumspect in its response to the speech, which also said Israel should eventually withdraw from Palestinian territory seized in the latest conflict and stop building settlements.

"When the Palestinians have eradicated terrorism and have proceeded to democratic reforms, it will be possible to progress to a political solution," the office said in a statement.

Palestinians have complained in recent weeks of what they see as a distinct US shift towards support for Sharon's hardline policies, justifying the Israeli military incursions on the West Bank as a question of self-defence.

A statement issued in the name of the Palestinian leadership made no mention of Bush's call Monday to oust Arafat, who has been criticised in Israel and the United States for failing to end the suicide bombings.

But the statement welcomed Bush's proposals as a "serious" effort to end the bloodshed that has cost more than 2,000 lives since the start of the Palestinian Intifada, or uprising, in September 2000.

Nukes for deterrence: Musharraf

AP, Islamabad

President Gen. Pervez Musharraf praised scientists on Monday for building the country's nuclear weapons and bringing the country to parity with rival India, but said the nuclear program was designed only to deter attack.

"Our nuclear and missile potential is defensive in nature and is a deterrent," Musharraf said. Pakistan "has no offensive designs against anybody."

Musharraf's remarks, reported by state-run news agency Associated Press of Pakistan, came as tensions between nuclear-armed neighbors eased after they were on the brink of all-out war.

"This achievement (nuclear weapons) is not by choice but has been through threat and compulsion that Pakistan was facing," Musharraf told a gathering of scientists at International Nathiagali Summer College, about 550 miles Islamabad.

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neighbors eased after they were on the brink of all-out war.

India has a no-first-use nuclear policy, but Pakistan, which has a much smaller army, never matched that pledge. The lack of balance raised fears that any new war between the hostile neighbors could go nuclear.

Tensions flared after a Dec. 14 attack on the Indian parliament, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based Islamic militants fighting Indian forces in the Indian-occupied section of Kashmir province. Pakistan denied any role in the attack.

Both countries dispatched hundreds of thousands of troops to their border in the biggest military mobilization in the region since 1971. Tensions eased after intensive U.S. and other international diplomacy and after Musharraf pledged to stop insurgents from crossing into the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir.

In New Delhi, India warned Musharraf against renegeing on his commitment to "permanently" end cross-border incursions into the disputed region.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf (L) receives a top US military commander General Tommy Franks prior to their talks in Islamabad on Monday. Franks held talks with Musharraf as a senior defence official insisted there was no "actionable" evidence Osama bin Laden was in the Pakistan. The US general later flew to Afghanistan's capital Kabul.

Mahathir to step down next year Abdullah to take over

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad will step down and be replaced by his deputy Abdullah Ahmad Badawi next year, his ruling party announced Tuesday.

Party secretary-general Khalil Yacob said Mahathir, who has been in power for 21 years, would quit after a summit meeting of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference here in October 2003.

Mahathir "has decided to step back and relinquish all his posts in UMNO, the National Coalition and the government," Yacob said.

The veteran leader stunned

headquarters, under a huge portrait of the veteran leader and flanked by Abdullah and other party leaders.

He said Mahathir would take two months leave before finally quitting office to enable a smooth transition of power to Abdullah.

Abdullah, who is both deputy prime minister and UMNO vice-president, told a news conference broadcast live after the announcement: "The (UMNO) supreme council supports (Mahathir's) decision 100 percent."

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US to launch manhunt for Laden

AFP, Washington

Frustrated at not finding Osama bin Laden, dead or alive, the US military may launch a new offensive in the next few months to capture the key suspect in the September 11 attacks, a report said.

US commanders are discussing another major offensive to find bin Laden by the end of the summer, said TIME magazine's website said Monday quoting a US military official.

Although the trail of the al-Qaida leader has gone cold since the height of the US-led campaign last year in Afghanistan to capture him and overthrow the Taliban, the White House believes he survived the war, Time said.

Bush has made it clear he wants bin Laden "erased" by September 11, 2002 -- the anniversary of the devastating attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon outside Washington, the magazine said.

"I think we've lost him," says a US counter terrorism official. "That's why you're not hearing much about the hunt--because we're not succeeding."

"For all his elusiveness, bin Laden probably hasn't strayed far from the region," TIME speculates. "Huge swaths of southern and eastern Afghanistan are still controlled by militants sympathetic to the Taliban and al-Qaeda."

Afghan cabinet sworn in

REUTERS, Kabul

Afghan President Hamid Karzai swore in his Cabinet Monday, completing a process begun at last week's grand assembly and seen as crucial to reconciling the country's traditionally warring tribes and leading it out of 23 years of war.

About half of the 29 ministers belong to the Tajik-led Northern Alliance, which swept the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban from power last year with U.S. help, with Karzai sticking largely to the same formula of the interim government set up by the U.N.-sponsored Bonn accord in December.

The fear is that without a stable government in Kabul, warlords and other factional leaders in the prov-

inces will continue to create their own fiefdoms where the rule of law is decided by the gun.

"We promise to fight against bureaucratic corruption and safeguard our independence and national sovereignty and we pledge to be honest and faithful to the country's national interest," Karzai told the ministers as part of the oath.

The ceremony, on a lawn under two huge plane trees surrounded by rosebushes in the presidential palace garden, was attended by ministers' families and officials of former King Zahir Shah.

Also present were representatives of the International Security Assistance Force, the multinational peacekeeping force for the capital, Kabul.



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan leftist activist, Nimalka Fernando, demonstrates on Tuesday outside the US embassy in the capital Colombo. Sri Lankan leftists are opposed to increased US military cooperation with the Sri Lankan government amid moves by Norway to broker peace in the island where Tamil rebels have been leading a drawn out campaign for independence.

Newborns are capable of visual recognition

AFP, Washington

Newborns are capable of establishing contact with people who look them directly in the eyes even when they are just days old, according to a European study published Monday in the United States.

Seventeen newborns two to five days old were shown photographs of people's faces with the eyes looking either directly at them or to the side. The babies looked almost twice as long at the pictures of people looking directly at them, researchers found.

The same researchers monitored brain activity of 15 four-month-old babies, and found that the activity became more intense when the babies saw people looking directly at them as opposed to people who looked elsewhere.

Ban on Pak political activities to go soon

PTI, Islamabad

Ahead of the general elections, Pakistan government has said it will lift restrictions on outdoor political activities from July 12 and announce schedule for the polls the same day.

"The government will announce schedule for general elections on July 12 with which the ban on political activities would go," Law Minister Khalid Ranjha told reporters in Rawalpindi yesterday.

Ranjha's announcement follow the decision by the 15-party umbrella group Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) to defy the ban and hold outdoor political rallies from July 15. ARD announced that its first rally would be held in Queta on July 15 followed by Peshawar and other big towns.

The ban on outdoor political

activities was imposed soon after the military coup in October 1999.

The political activities are expected to gather steam as and when exiled former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif return to contest the October elections. Both had said they would return to lead their parties during the polls.

Ranjha also said the government would release the package of controversial constitutional amendments in the first week of July for debate, media reports here said.

The amendments, which were opposed by the country's mainstream political parties, were aimed at strengthening the powers of the country's President over the Parliament and the Cabinet.

Pakistan detains militants on suspicion of aiding al-Qaida

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistani police are swooping on outlawed sectarian militants in the belief that they aided al-Qaida members in recent deadly attacks against foreigners, security officials said Tuesday. Police arrested another 17 Sunni militants from across Punjab province in the country's east on Monday, after rounding up some 45 Sunni militants in the provincial capital Lahore late Sunday, a Punjab police officer told AFP.

The arrests were based on the belief that the banned Sunni Muslim groups Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) and Jaish-e-Mohammad, which also fights

attack outside the US consulate there in which 12 people were killed. No consular staff were among the dead.

Police believe the same attackers were behind the May 8 suicide blast outside Karachi's Sheraton hotel which killed 11 French nationals and three Pakistanis including the bomber.

The intelligence officer said two detained "sectarian terrorists", Lashkar-i-Jhangvi's Attaur Rehman Bokhari and Fazal Karim, "have been working with al-Qaida terrorists to hit targets in Pakistan."

The round-up of militants, including the arrest of two suspected Lashkar-i-Jhangvi hitmen in the volatile southern city of Karachi last week, follows the June 14 car bomb

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PHOTO: AFP

An elderly woman from of the village of Staraya Stanitsa near Armavir, the second biggest city in Krasnodar region in the Southern Russia, uses a staff to help her wade through the floodwater around her home on Monday. At least thirteen people died in Krasnodar region and some twelve thousand houses have been completely destroyed.