



PHOTO: AFP

A Philippine Coast Guard ship lifts the wreckage of the ill-fated plane of Laoag Air domestic flight 585 off Manila Bay yesterday. At least 14 people were killed and five others feared dead after the Fokker-27 plane carrying 29 passengers and crew crashed upon takeoff at Manila airport.

## 14 die as plane plunges into Manila Bay

### Five more feared dead, seven critically injured

AFP, Manila

At least 14 people were killed with five others feared dead when a Fokker plane carrying 34 crashed into waters off the Philippine capital shortly after takeoff Monday, officials said.

Fifteen survivors were rescued by naval and fishing boats and taken to hospitals, where seven of them are said to be in critical condition.

The Fokker-27 plane, belonging to small domestic airline LaoagAir, had just taken off with 29 passengers and five crew for the northern city of Laoag at about 6:00am (2200 GMT Sunday) when it crashed into Manila Bay, the Air Transportation Office (ATO) said.

The Philippine Coastguard said the bodies of 14 people, including a Briton and an Australian, had been recovered.

Seven Australians - five from Sydney, one from Brisbane and one working in Manila - and three Britons were on the ill-fated Flight 585. They were on holiday with some of them planning a surfing break in northern Ilocos Norte province.

The wreckage of the aircraft was completely submerged in 45 feet (14 metres) of murky water.

Witnesses said they saw black smoke and the tail fins snap off before the plane plunged into the bay. Initial reports said engine trouble may have caused the accident.

"After takeoff, the pilot declared an emergency to the tower and he issued a procedure that they are going to make a ditching to Manila Bay," ATO director Edilberto Yap told ABS-CBN television network.

"The airplane was broken because of the impact of the water when it ditched," he said.

Ten hours after the crash, the Coastguard said the five people who remained missing could have died.

The survivors included the plane's captain, Bernie Crisostomo, his co-pilot and a flight attendant, as well as two Australian passengers, Steve Thompson and Bryan Forrester.

According to Thompson, smoke billowed from the plane before it crashed minutes after takeoff,

preceded by a warning from the captain to "brace for landing," radio reports said.

Philippine President Gloria Arroyo, who visited one of several hospitals treating the wounded, ordered the ATO to swiftly determine the cause of the crash "with a view to averting similar happenings in the future."

Flight attendant Adhika Espinosa told Arroyo from his hospital bed that he helped several passengers out of the plane after it crashed.

"When our plane finally ditched at the waters, I took off my seat-belt and I went to the passengers to lead them out of the plane," Espinosa said.

Colonel Ernesto Levanza, commander of the Philippine Air Force operational wing, said the missing passengers may be trapped inside the plane.

"Some are believed trapped with their seat-belts still on," he said. Briton Thuan Nguyen and Australian Darren Green were among those confirmed dead.

The Briton was travelling together with his wife, Julia Nguyen,

and son Minh Nguyen, who is a member of British non-governmental organization Voluntary Service Overseas, according to Boyd Hagart-Alexander, the group's local program manager.

Julia and Minh Nguyen had not been accounted for.

The three were of Vietnamese ancestry and hold British passports. ATO director Yap said all Fokker planes owned by the airline had been grounded pending investigations.

Rescue operations involved more than two dozen boats from the Philippine Coastguard and navy, as well as the air force, army, auxiliary troops and expert divers.

According to airport rescue workers, the plane suffered engine trouble before crashing less than five minutes after takeoff along a reclaimed portion of Manila Bay in Balabacan district.

Asked to confirm that the plane went down due to engine trouble, Yap said: "Maybe, maybe. We are going to determine that very soon."

## Nepal gripped by strike

BBC ONLINE

Normal life in Nepal is being severely disrupted on the first day of a three-day general strike called by the country's underground Maoist rebel movement.

The Maoists have been fighting for the overthrow of Nepal's constitutional monarchy for nearly seven years.

Soldiers and police are patrolling the streets of the capital and other towns but that is about the only activity taking place.

With schools and almost all businesses and offices shut, the country has come to a complete standstill.

On a few building sites, labourers are still at work but they are the exception to the rule.

The Maoists enforced their strike call in recent days with a wave of bombings and attacks.

In the Kathmandu area, several government offices were damaged and three women were injured early on Saturday morning when a bomb went off next to a Buddhist temple.

Across the country, other attacks blamed on the rebels claimed at least four lives.

The government insists that it will continue to function but few civil servants have come to their offices.

A regular Monday cabinet meeting is to take place and newspaper reports say the main item on the agenda will be how best to coax the rebels into a peace process.

Nearly seven years of violence have left more than 7,000 people dead, according to the Royal Nepalese Army.



PHOTO: AFP

## Gates to donate \$100m to combat AIDS in India

AP, New Delhi

Bill Gates will contribute \$100 million to help fight AIDS in India, a member of his foundation said yesterday. The money would be used for HIV prevention, the official said on condition of anonymity, shortly before Gates was to announce the initiative at a news conference in New Delhi.

Gates arrived in India yesterday for a 4-day visit. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation said he would make "a long-term, strategic commitment to support the country's efforts to slow the spread of HIV/AIDS." He visited a clinic for HIV-positive patients yesterday morning.

Gates wrote in a weekend article in The New York Times that India is "well on its way to becoming a global economic power." However, much of this progress could be thwarted by AIDS, he wrote.

## Five Israelis killed in kibbutz shooting

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel was mulling its response yesterday to an attack, which killed five Israelis on a northern kibbutz after a double suicide bombing was thwarted in the same area, casting a pall on a fresh US mission to promote a roadmap for peace in the region.

Another and her two children, as well as two other adults were gunned down by at least one Palestinian who sprayed automatic rifle fire on the residents of Metzger after he managed to infiltrate the collective farm late Sunday.

Another seven Israelis were injured in the shooting spree before the gunman escaped, and as security forces continued a hunt in the area, newly-appointed Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz met aides to consider his reaction to the fresh spate of violence.

Earlier Sunday, two Palestinian would-be suicide bombers had managed to sneak across the Green Line from the West Bank into the same area, but blew themselves up without injuring anyone after border guards spotted them.

Israeli helicopters also blasted a Gaza City workshop overnight, causing no injuries, but the army insisted the operation was not in retaliation for the kibbutz shooting.

Israel characteristically pointed its finger at Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, with government spokesman Avi Pazner describing his Palestinian Authority as "a mass production terror factory".

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades - an armed offshoot of Arafat's Fatah group - claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement faxed to AFP.

The headline group said the deadly shooting was in retaliation for the killing by the Israeli army of a chief of another radical movement, Islamic Jihad, blamed by the security services for two suicide bomb attacks which killed 31 Israelis and injured scores more.

The army scaled back its presence in the Jenin area after it killed 32-year-old Iyad Sawalha on Saturday, but a senior officer acknowledged it could only be "a matter of weeks" before militant groups regrouped in the northern West Bank town.

The attack also came as Fatah

was holding talks with Hamas in Cairo in an apparent bid to persuade the radical Islamic group to put an end to suicide bombings against Israel.

The contradictory signals appeared to further complicate US envoy David Satterfield's mission to the region, which was aimed at discussing a new "roadmap" for peace with both parties and regional players.

The plan, which calls for a de facto Palestinian state to be established next year with provisional borders, and a definitive state by 2005, was discussed with Arab governments by US envoy William Burns during a regional tour last month.

Both sides have approved it in principle but demand more time to hold consultations and let the dust settle after periods of internal political upheaval.

As Satterfield was scheduled to arrive in Israel early Monday afternoon, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's chief of staff was crossing the Atlantic in the other direction to ask for additional US aid.

## Cracks in Kashmir coalition govt

ANN, Jammu

Cracks have started surfacing in the PDP-led coalition government within the first week of its tenure.

The chief of J&K National Panthers Party, an important coalition partner, Professor Bhim Singh, yesterday not only criticised the Congress and the PDP for ignoring it but also levelled serious allegations at the Congress for buying almost all its seats at the recently concluded Assembly elections "at anything between Rs 5 and Rs 40 lakh".

While accusing the Congress of not fulfilling its commitment regarding

the allocation of one Rajya Sabha seat to his party, he said it has also allotted an unimportant portfolio to Legislation Party leader Mr Harsh Dev Singh. His party, he said, is tremendously unhappy with the new government of which they are a part.

He said the Congress leaders, who had exploited Jammu to the maximum, had reached a dead end. Mufti assurance: Mufti Md Sayeed has said his government would fully empower panchayats for achieving broader objectives of rural development, effective functioning of administrative apparatus at the grass-roots level with total community involvement.

## Russian train coaches derail, four dead

AFP, Moscow

Four people died and six were injured when two commuter train coaches derailed Monday in a station in Saint Petersburg, Russia's second city, Interfax news agency reported.

An initial toll said five people had died.

Rail officials said brake failure appeared to be the cause of the accident. The coaches became detached from a train and derailed, falling onto a platform in the Baltisky rail terminal.

The train was not carrying passengers and all those who died or suffered injuries were standing on the railway platform.

## Coalition forces under fresh attack in Afghanistan

AFP

Up to 15 rockets have been fired at coalition forces in southeastern Afghanistan in what the US military said yesterday was an unusually well-organised attack.

US spokesman Colonel Roger King said that the assault on a base at Lwara, close to the border with Pakistan, involved around a dozen 107mm rockets fired almost simultaneously from three different positions.

None of the missiles hit their target and there were no casualties.

"There was no damage to US personnel or equipment," King told reporters at Bagram air base, north of Kabul. "US special forces responded by firing mortars and sent a quick reaction force."

King said the weekend attack involved a larger number of projectiles than usually targeted at coalition outposts and was clearly more coordinated than previous strikes.

This incident took place a week after five US outposts were targeted in a series of rocket attacks within the space of 24 hours. It was not known if the assaults were linked.

## 7 cops dead in Kashmir mine explosion

### Key separatist leader set free

AFP, Srinagar

At least seven Indian policemen were killed yesterday when their bus struck a mine planted by suspected Islamic rebels in Indian-administered Kashmir, police said.

It was the first attack on Indian troops since Mufti Mohammed Sayeed was sworn in November 2 as the disputed state's leader and promised to reform security forces.

The bus was carrying members of India's Central Reserve Police Force from the summer capital Srinagar to the winter capital Jammu when it went over the mine around midday in Ramsu village in the southern Doda district.

At least three of the policemen were killed and five others injured, a police source said.

Sayeed, a former Indian home minister, has pledged to bring a "healing touch" to the violence-torn province. He has also promised to

release political prisoners and initiate unconditional dialogue with rebels.

Sayeed, who leads the regional People's Democratic Party, is heading a coalition with India's main opposition Congress. In violent September 16-October 8 elections, the two parties together swept out of power the long-ruling National Conference, which had taken a more hawkish position on the insurgency.

Meanwhile, senior separatist leader Yasin Malik was freed from prison yesterday as part of attempts by Indian-administered Kashmir's new leaders to restore peace in the troubled Himalayan state, an official said.

Malik, who heads the once-outlawed Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was freed from prison in the southern city of Jammu and was being flown to the northern summer capital Srinagar, JKLF spokesman Mohammad Ashraf said.

## Tornadoes in US kill 26

AP, Larksville, Tenn

Devastating tornadoes ripped through Alabama, Tennessee and Ohio on Sunday, killing at least 26 people, trapping others in damaged buildings and leaving thousands without power, authorities said.

The toll included at least nine deaths in Alabama, 12 in Tennessee and five in Ohio, officials said. Dozens were injured, and authorities expected the number of victims to grow as they pick through the damage scattered across the region.

One of the hardest-hit areas was Mossy Grove, a tiny town about 40 miles west of Knoxville where a tornado touched down at about 10 p.m. Authorities said 45 people were believed to be missing in the area.

"Its mass destruction, death," said Ken Morgan, an officer in nearby Oliver Springs. "Mossy Grove is destroyed ... We're just getting bits and pieces right now, but there are several dead and several missing."

Much of the damage was initially believed to be concentrated in Tennessee and Ohio, but reports began to emerge late Sunday that devastating storms had struck Alabama as well. At least nine people were killed in the northern part of the state, and another 46 were injured.

## Famine looms over Ethiopia

### 15 million people at risk, PM tells BBC

AFP, London

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi yesterday called for urgent international action to avoid a major catastrophe in the east African country where 15 million people face a famine disaster.

"The facts speak for themselves," Zenawi told BBC radio. "The disaster we had 1984-1985, the number involved was roughly a third to one half of the number of people involved now."

"So if that was a nightmare, this will be too ghastly to contemplate."

The World Food Programme (WFP) warned at the beginning of the month that it could run out of

food aid for drought-stricken Ethiopia as early as December unless governments respond quickly to the call for emergency aid.

"The current drought is unique because the short rains and the long rains have failed," said the stricken country's Prime Minister.

Ethiopia has two rainy seasons, a short season beginning in February and running through April and a long one beginning in June and ending in September.

But this year, no rain fell during the short rainy season, while the long season began late and saw too little precipitation.

UN agencies in Ethiopia have estimated that more than six million

Ethiopians -- or one person in six -- are threatened by the drought, which has hit several parts of the Horn of Africa country, stretching from the northeast down to the southeast.

According to Zenawi, there could be as many as 15 million Ethiopians at risk and there was "no possibility" that Ethiopia could cope without international aid.

"Even if we had the food available in the domestic market the government doesn't have the money to buy this surplus food for redistribution. "So we can't cope on our own with the requirements of the current drought," he said.

Ethiopia needed food aid in

"huge amounts" to avoid catastrophe, he warned. "That is going to be in the realm of hundreds of thousands of dollars (euros), if not millions," he said. "We are hopeful that we will get much of what is required."

The work of the WFP and other aid organisations is hampered by Ethiopia's strained relations with its coastal neighbour Eritrea in the wake of the 1998-2000 war between the two countries.

During the last major emergency relief operation before the war, more than 80 per cent of incoming aid passed through Eritrean ports - now off limits for shipments bound for Ethiopia.

## Egypt's controversial TV series begins with a big yawn

AFP, Cairo

Men of all ages shuffled into a cafe off Cairo's noisy streets and took up their seats at midnight to watch a television series that has angered Israel and the United States.

It was time for a new episode of "Fares bila Jawad" (Knight Without a Horse), a slow-moving 19th-century period piece peopled with men in red fez headgear and women in long-flowing white gowns.

Within minutes, most of the viewers began fidgeting and their attention shifted to their glasses of hot sweet black tea and their water-pipes, which sent wafts of aromatic tobacco into the air.

"I thought I would see (star actor) Mohamed Sobhi fighting the Jews.

Instead we are watching a story that starts more than a hundred years ago," said 35-year-old Atef, as he invited his friends to a game of cards.

As chatting among viewers grew louder, the owner of the working class-cafe grabbed the remote control and zapped to an American film to try to keep his customers interested.

"The series might turn out to be interesting, but it seems we will not see the hero of this program before the start of the 10th or the 15th episode, when Mohamed Sobhi grows up," grinned Khaled, a regular client.

The first of 41 nightly episodes aired Wednesday night, the first day

of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast during the day and gather with friends and family late into the night.

It has continued nightly here since then on state-run Channel Two, and is being broadcast on several other Arab television stations.

US diplomats monitoring the series found no objectionable material in the first episode but will continue to watch for possible anti-Semitic content, two State Department officials said Friday.

An official in Washington questioned its entertainment value, saying some accounts of the program from Cairo had described the first episode as "boring."



Ambassador Mahmood Hasan presented to President Hosni Mubarak the letters of credence accrediting him as Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Bangladesh, to Egypt.

## S Korea chief's son sentenced

AP, Seoul

A Seoul court sentenced the third and youngest son of President Kim Dae-jung to a suspended prison term Monday for receiving bribes from businessmen. Kim Hong-gul, 39, was also fined \$167,000.

Prosecutors had sought a four-year sentence and a fine of \$1.3 million against Kim, who was indicted in June on charges of taking \$2.8 million in bribes in an influence-peddling scandal.

Seoul District Court Justice Kim Yong-hyun gave the president's youngest son a suspended two-year prison term.

In a separate case early this month, President Kim's second eldest son, Hong-up, 50, was sentenced to 3 years in prison for taking bribes from businessmen. Prosecutors had sought a six-year jail term.