

23 killed as train derails in Maharashtra

AFP, Mumbai

At least 23 people, including three children and four women, were killed and 25 others injured, when three bogies of the Kara-Mumbai holiday special train derailed after hitting a boulder which had rolled on the tracks following a landslide in Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra on Sunday night.

The accident occurred at 10.30 pm between Rajapur and Vaibhavwadi when the Mumbai-bound 904 up train from Karwar was passing through a tunnel, Konkan Railway sources said in Mumbai on Monday. This is the first accident on the Konkan Railway sector.

The remaining eight coaches of the train, along with injured persons, were taken to Kankavali by the rescue team.

The injured, 15 of them in serious condition, have been

admitted to a hospital there, the sources said.

The seriously injured included the driver and the assistant driver of the train.

Following the derailment, traffic on the Mumbai-Goa section of the Konkan Railway has been severely affected, the sources said.

The landslide was apparently caused due to heavy rains lashing the area for the past several days, sources added.

One of the deceased has been identified as Ratnakar Rane of Mumbai police, the sources said adding, since the train was a holiday special, the list of passengers is not available.

Meanwhile, Railway Minister Nitish Kumar has ordered an inquiry, to be conducted by the Commissioner, Safety, Railways, into the accident. Kumar, Railway Board Chairman and other officials have reached the accident site.

Hong Kong declared SARS-free

BBC ONLINE, Hong Kong

Hong Kong has been declared free of Sars, 20 days after the last confirmed case of the disease in the city.

The World Health Organization called the development a "very significant achievement in the history of Sars control", following 296 deaths from the disease in Hong Kong.

The announcement follows the lifting of the WHO's travel advisory on Hong Kong late last month.

But WHO officials are warning that the territory must remain vigilant if it is to avoid the kind of recurrence of the pneumonia-type disease experienced by the Canadian city of Toronto.



PHOTO: AFP

Activists from the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) shout anti-Indian slogans as Pakistani police (R) push back them from marching towards the Indian embassy in Islamabad on Monday. Seeking an end to violence in Kashmir, the JKLF activists were demanding independence for Kashmir.

Notorious militant nabbed in Pakistan

REUTERS, Multan

Pakistani police said on Monday they had arrested a prominent Islamic militant and four associates from a group linked to the murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl and bloody bombings of Western targets.

Shahab-uddin, alias Imran, a provincial chief of the banned Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, one of Pakistan's most feared militant groups, was arrested overnight in the central city of Multan, they said.

"He was among the top five terrorists of Pakistan and most wanted man of Lashkar," Multan's deputy police chief, Iftikhar Ahmad Chaudhry, told a news conference.

"He was wanted for several attacks on Shi'ites and killings of policemen."

Pakistan officials say the Sunni Muslim Lashkar-e-Jhangvi had close ties to Afghanistan's former Taliban regime, having fought with it against the now ruling Northern Alliance when the United States attacked Afghanistan in 2001.

Japanese dy FM in Myanmar to push for Suu Kyi's release

AFP, Yangon

Japan's deputy foreign minister Tetsuro Yano arrived in Myanmar Monday on a one-day mission to press for the release of detained pro-democracy opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, officials said.

They confirmed Yano was greeted at Yangon airport by deputy foreign minister Khin Maung Win, who hosted his Japanese counterpart for lunch before expected afternoon meetings with other members of the ruling military junta.

"He has asked to see Secretary One (military intelligence chief General Khin Nyunt) but at this point we have no idea whether he will meet him or not," an official source told AFP.

"As far as we know he has not asked to see Aung San Suu Kyi," he said.

Yano, who arrived from Thailand where he represented Japan at the Asia Cooperation Dialogue at the weekend, was also carrying a message from Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the source added.

On Saturday a Japanese foreign ministry spokesman reiterated his government's warning that Tokyo may "reconsider our relations" with the junta, known as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Musharraf to shed uniform in 3 years

ANI, London

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said he might step down as chief of army staff within three years. "Due to instability in Pakistan such a move could not happen immediately," he added.

Musharraf said this here on Sunday while on the first leg of his five-nation tour.

It may be recalled that there had been immense pressure on the "president in uniform" to relinquish the post of army chief. Almost the entire Opposition is united on this issue.

Announcing that he was contemplating to quit as army chief within three years, he said, "I do agree in principle that I should not be a combination of president and the chief of army staff and sooner or later I have to give up this appointment of chief of army staff," The News reported on Monday.

However, he said that he was required to wear the uniform due to the prevailing sense of instability in

his country. "Under these destabilised conditions, there is a requirement of my wearing these two hats," he said adding, "Once stability comes and let me judge it myself and I will judge it in all sincerity and honesty I will give up the army chief's role."

On the fears of Talibanisation of Pakistan, the President said, "I sincerely think there is no danger, for the reasons I know the people of Pakistan. The majority people of Pakistan and I are against the Talibanisation or extremism or obscurantism view of Islam."

He further said, "Pakistanis are moderate and they want a progressive and enlightened Islamic state. And we are an Islamic State. We are Muslim, the people are staunch Muslims but they certainly are not for an extremist view of Islam. I am very clear about it. So therefore, whatever is happening in the Frontier province must not alarm the world, it is not the perception of the vast majority of people of Pakistan."

China pledges \$500m investment for Indian development

PTI, Beijing

China on Monday pledged an investment of \$500 million for infrastructure development and resource building in India and agreed to a plan of action for economic cooperation between the two countries.

This was stated by the External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha after hour-long talks between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and his Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao at the Great Hall of the People here. Sinha told reporters that the Chinese side sought cooperation in the area of public finance and the need for setting up a mechanism for a dialogue in this regard.

The two sides also signed nine accords, including those on simplifying visa procedures, enhancing cooperation on renewable energy and increasing contacts in the field of law and justice.

Sinha said that the Chinese Premier made eight significant points to enhance ties between the two countries that included mutual understanding and trust and greater people to people contact.

Sinha said the two sides discussed the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra which is scheduled to start

next month. Also discussed was the opening of additional routes for it and improving facilities for Indian pilgrims on the Tibetan side.

During their wide-ranging talks, Vajpayee and Wen explored the possibility of boosting the trade potential.

The Chinese Premier said that the pledged \$500 million would also be utilised in setting up various projects in India, Sinha said.

China also stressed on the cooperation between the two neighbours at international and multilateral fora besides increasing cultural exchanges.

Both the leaders, he said agreed that the 50th anniversary of Panchsheel, the five principles of peaceful co-existence, should be observed with "great elan" and the respective foreign offices would work out a detailed plan, he said.

Vajpayee shared with Wen India's views on the situation in South Asia, Afghanistan and North Korea, Sinha said. The tri-lateral meeting between the foreign ministers of India, China and Russia which was held last year on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly also figured in the discussions, he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Indian Congress Party MP Sunil Dutt (L) holds a flag with flying doves as Delhi's Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit (C) addresses a press conference at the start of a peace march (Sadbhavana Abhiyan) from Rajghat, New Delhi on Monday. The week-long march through the state of Rajasthan led by Dutt aims to promote nationwide social unity. Others pictured are unidentified.

Tiger gunman kills intelligence officer in Lanka

AFP, Colombo

A suspected Tamil Tiger gunman Monday shot dead a police intelligence officer from an anti-terrorism unit outside the Sri Lankan capital Colombo, officials said.

Inspector Nihal Thabrew was shot in the head while he was asleep at the Dehiwala police station, officials said, adding the attacker was caught as he tried to escape in a taxi.

"Police chased the suspect and arrested him," a police spokesman said. "He tried to take cyanide to avoid being captured, but our people stopped him in the nick of time."

Tamil Tiger rebels are known to take cyanide rather than risk being taken alive by police or security forces.

Indian cops foil attempt on state ministers

AFP, Ahmedabad

Police in the western Indian state of Gujarat Monday shot dead two hit men from a gang led by a notorious mafia don who were allegedly bent on killing two state ministers, a senior police official said.

The two men -- identified as Mahindra Yadav and Ganesh Kotte - had come to Gujarat to carry out the assassinations as well as to disrupt an annual Hindu festival beginning next week, the official said.

The two, from a gang led by don Dawood Ibrahim, were killed in a shootout in the Panchkua area of Gujarat's commercial capital Ahmedabad in the early hours of Monday. Police had been tipped off about their presence in the area.



PHOTO: AFP

Bhutanese Queen, Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuk (L) is welcomed by Nepalese Crown Prince Paras (R) at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu on Monday. The Bhutanese Queen is in Nepal on a week-long visit at the invitation of King Gyanendra.