



Debbie Malloy and her son Dell Zurcher look upon the damage behind her house after tornadoes from Tropical Storm Bonnie touched down in North Carolina. At least 3 people were killed and more than two dozen injured as buildings also were damaged and power supplies were disrupted.

PHOTO: AFP, Miami

Hurricane leaves trail of devastation in Florida

"Right now, it's mass damage," said Kimberly Casale, a city administrator in the town of Arcadia, one of the hardest-hit areas.

The hurricane ripped the roof off the civic center being used as an emergency shelter for 1,500 people. No one was injured, Casale said, but rescuers struggled to reach critically injured people elsewhere.

In nearby Port Charlotte, the sheriff's office sustained a partial roof collapse, a regional medical center lost primary and backup power and damage was widespread.

"I have never seen anything like it," said Katherine McMahon, owner of a local bed and breakfast.

Earlier, Hurricane Daylight revealed widespread devastation in Florida yesterday after Hurricane Charley raked across the state, leaving an unknown number of dead, half a million without electricity and "mass damage" in its wake.

With three confirmed deaths in Florida and four in Cuba Friday, the death toll was on the rise yesterday with US media reporting an unspecified

number of fatalities at a mobile home park in Punta Gorda, a bayside city on Florida's west coast taken by surprise when the massive hurricane came to shore further south than expected.

The town's emergency manager Wayne Sallade tearfully told CNN he had ordered 60 body bags.

National guardsmen were guarding the site, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency had taken control of medical care in the town after its hospital shut down, the network said.

"Punta Gorda appears to be ground zero," said Craig Fugate, the state's director of emergency management.

But many more communities were slammed Friday when Charley blew across the state packing winds of up to 235 kilometers (145 miles) per hour.

Television showed images of shredded palm trees and collapsed buildings surrounded by crumpled metal.

"We have a major effort underway related to search and rescue and it extends from the coast well into the interior of our state," Dr John Agwunobe of the Florida State Department of Health said.

Asked for an assessment of casualties and damage, Linda Long of the

Florida Division of Emergency Management told AFP: "We're waiting for the sun to come up."

A weakened Charley was churning over the Atlantic Ocean early Saturday, heading northeast at 40 kilometers (25 miles) per hour with sustained winds of 137 kilometers (85 miles) per hour.

A hurricane warning was in effect along the southeastern United States from Georgia to Virginia and officials said Charley was likely to smash into South Carolina sometime Saturday.

Forecasters warned of drenching rains, potential flash floods and tornados along the eastern seaboard of the United States.

"The early indications are that this storm has had a devastating impact on our state," Florida Governor Jeb Bush told a press conference after the hurricane made landfall on the state's west coast on Friday.

Officials urged at least 1.4 million Floridians to flee ahead of the storm -- one of the largest peacetime evacuations in US history. The mandatory evacuation orders however were widely ignored.

Many who did flee Tampa and communities on Florida's Gulf Coast

found that the storm deviated from its expected path and hit the cities where they had taken refuge -- such as Orlando and Daytona Beach.

President George W. Bush, the Florida governor's brother, declared the southeastern state eligible for disaster relief assistance.

"I have declared an emergency and the process is now in place to aid, provide federal aid to those who may be affected by this hurricane," Bush said in a statement late Friday from the northwestern United States, where he is campaigning.

"We ask God's blessing on those who were in the path of that hurricane."

Charley is already Florida's worst natural disaster since Hurricane Andrew ripped through the south Miami-Dade region in 1992, state officials said. Charley battered Cuba for more than two hours, tearing roofs off houses, ripping up trees and cutting power. Four men died, civilian defense officials said. One drowned, one was killed by a falling tree and two were killed when buildings collapsed.

Kidnapped UK journalist released

BBC ONLINE

The British journalist kidnapped from a hotel in Basra has been handed over to UK officials in southern Iraq, following his release.

Earlier on Friday, James Brandon, 23, was taken to the Basra office of radical cleric Moqtada Sadr and freed.

His kidnappers, who had threatened to kill him on a video, had treated him well once they knew he was a journalist, Brandon said.

He was kidnapped by masked gunmen from his hotel room in Basra on Thursday.

A Foreign Office spokeswoman said it was "relieved" he had been freed, adding: "He is safe and well and in the hands of the British Office in Basra."

In a hastily arranged press conference after his release, Brandon, from London, thanked his kidnappers.

US to pull 70,000 troops out of Europe, Asia

REUTERS, Washington

made in Europe, mostly in Germany.

There are more than 100,000 US troops in Europe, including about 70,000 in Germany, and another 100,000 in the Pacific region and Asia. About 150,000 troops are stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A senior administration official traveling with Bush in Portland, Oregon, said the president "will be discussing next week how the United States will structure its military capabilities to meet the threats of the 21st century with new technologies and new capabilities."

"It's important not that our military posture reflect the Cold War but the new threats of the 21st century," said the senior official.

Like the official traveling with Bush, officials in Washington refused to provide details, beyond saying there would be a major realignment. One official said there would be a "fairly

significant reduction" in forces.

"This is not a diminished commitment to our allies or to our responsibilities in the world," said another official.

The US military announced earlier this year that it was removing about 12,500 of the 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea for decades and sending many of them to Iraq or Afghanistan.

One US official said, however, some of those troops could be returned to South Korea.

"Germany is definitely a place where there will be a major re-arrangement," said an official.

Pentagon officials have been studying US commitments overseas for more than two years in an initiative to re-arrange the ponderous global deployments of US forces adopted in the Cold War and make the American military more mobile in the new war on terrorism.

Investigators were questioning them about their links with al-Qaeda operatives plotting the assassination of Pakistani leaders, he said.

4 more al-Qaeda suspects caught in Pakistan

AFP, Lahore

Authorities in Pakistan have arrested another four suspects in their ongoing hunt against al-Qaeda linked militants, officials said yesterday.

Police arrested two suspects, Muhammad Imran and Qari Muhammad Noor, from the eastern cities of Sargodha and Faisalabad on Friday, a police officer told AFP, requesting anonymity.

Imran was wanted for a July 30 suicide attack on prime minister designate Shaukat Aziz, he said.

Noor was arrested along with two other unidentified companions in Faisalabad, he said.

Investigators were questioning them about their links with al-Qaeda operatives plotting the assassination of Pakistani leaders, he said.



People spend the night in front of the shrine of Imam Ali (RA) in Najaf early yesterday as thousands of supporters of Sadr flocked to the holy Shia city, where the cleric and his militia have held out against a US-led assault for over a week.

PHOTO: AFP

'India won't sign NPT in its current form'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

and Pakistan joining the NPT and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) regimes and their adherence to the international code of conduct relating to missile technology production and export, Press Secretary of Japanese Foreign Ministry Hatohisa Takashima told reporters Friday night.

Kawaguchi, who wrapped up her two-day visit to India after arriving here from Pakistan, emphasised the importance of nuclear disarmament but was told by New Delhi that it considered NPT as an unfair and discriminatory treaty in its current shape and it was simply unacceptable.

India carries out first execution in a decade

AFP, Kolkata

A man convicted of raping and killing a schoolgirl was executed here early yesterday, becoming the first person hanged for their crimes in India in nearly a decade.

Apartment guard Dhananjoy Chatterjee, 42, was executed at 4:30 am (2300 GMT Friday), a jail official told reporters outside the prison.

He had been sentenced to death in 1991 for the rape and murder of a teenage schoolgirl the previous year.

Among hundreds of people who gathered outside the prison were human rights activists who held an all-night vigil to protest the execution. About 200 policemen watched over the crowd.

Some of the protesters carried banners which read "Stop capital punishment" and "Abolish the death penalty."

Police find 83 corpses at black magic shrine in Nigeria

AFP, Abuja

Nigerian police have so far recovered a total of 83 corpses from an "evil forest" following raids on black magic shrines in the south of the country, the force said Friday as it released an interim report.

Nigeria's deputy police chief, Sunday Ehindero, told reporters that investigators had recovered documents listing the names of Nigerians who went to the Okija shrines to consult the traditional deities.

The grisly discoveries in Okija forest have become a sensation in Nigeria, where it is commonly believed that many of the rich and powerful secretly attend black magic ceremonies to strengthen their authority.

The police will carry out radiological studies into some bones and forensic investigation on the corpses, some of which heads have been severed," he said.

"Police are concerned about how the headless bodies found their way into the shrines. The priests must tell us who owns the skulls and skeletons," he said.

Male calm under curfew 100 pro-democracy activists detained

PTI, Male, Maldives

has the authority to suspend citizens' rights, as well as prevent people from gathering or being voices of criticism of the government.

The government justified the move, saying the step was taken to "prevent deterioration of law and order."

Earlier, pro-democracy activists had gathered outside police headquarters in Male to protest the detention of four people. Worried that a stand-off might develop, police later released the four.

But security forces fired tear gas and rounded up several demonstrators from the crowd, which swelled to an estimated 3,000, refused to leave, said witnesses who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The protest was a rare event in a country where political dissent is tolerated. Political parties are banned in Maldives, a nation of 278,000 people on 1,192 coral islands, about 500 kilometers off the coast of India.

India on red alert for Independence Day Blast in Assam cinema injures 20

AFP, New Delhi

August 15 as "black day."

Home ministry officials said intelligence reports warned of possible attacks by the pan-Islamic militant groups Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba during Sunday's celebrations marking the 57th anniversary of independence from Britain.

The two groups were blamed for a December 2001 attack on the Indian parliament that nearly set off a war with rival Pakistan.

Air force fighter jets and attack helicopters were placed on standby in New Delhi as cities such as Bombay, Madras and Calcutta deployed their entire police force on red security alert, the home ministry officials said.

Passenger train services will be suspended for some duration at the Old Delhi Railway Station, which adjoins the Red Fort.

Despite the high security, unidentified attackers Saturday hurled a grenade at a cinema in the northeastern state of Assam, injuring some 20 moviegoers, police said.

UN staff back in Baghdad Iraq wants multinational forces under UN banner

BBC ONLINE, AFP, Baghdad

The United Nations has returned international staff to Iraq, nearly a year after a bomb attack on their Baghdad headquarters killed 22 people.

Among the dead was the Secretary General's special representative, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

His replacement is former Pakistani diplomat Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, who arrived in the capital on Friday. But although the UN is back in the country, the organisation is keeping a low profile.

Qazi spent his first day at work in Baghdad meeting the prime minister

and president of the interim government and talking up the prospects of the national conference that is to be held on Sunday.

On Sunday, 1,000 delegates to the national conference are meant to gather in the same place to elect a national assembly to support the work of the interim government.

That next step in the Iraqi political process was due two weeks ago but was deferred at the request of the UN to ensure the conference was more representative.

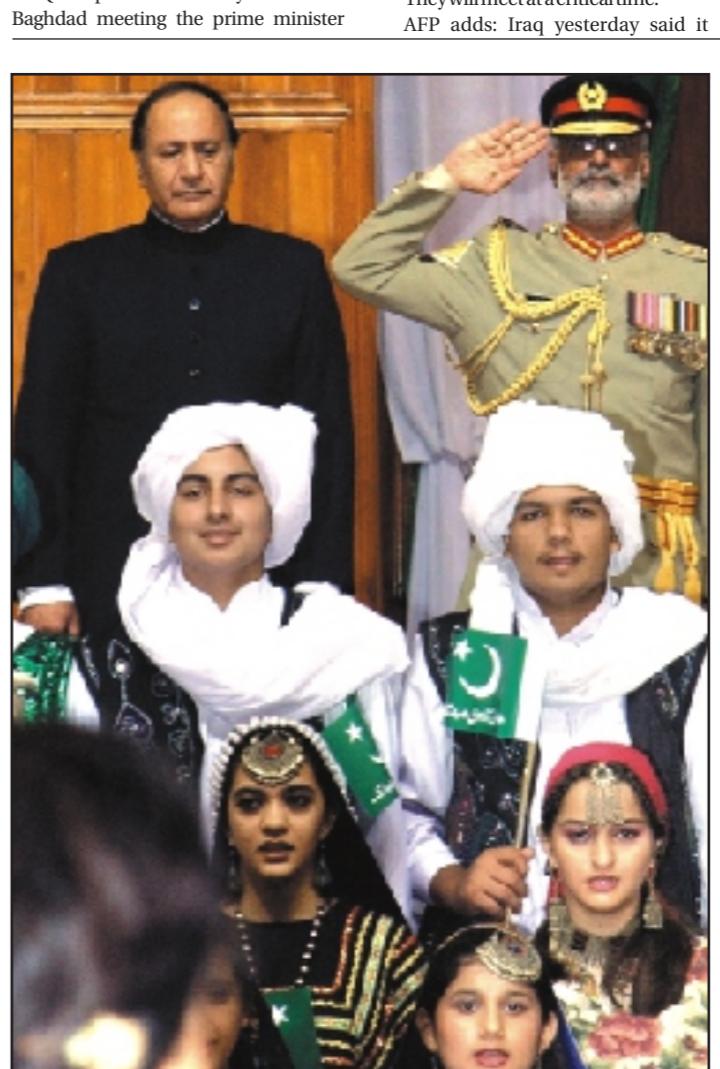
They will meet at a critical time. AFP adds: Iraq yesterday said it

wanted multinational police forces to operate under a United Nations banner to control the violent insurgency across the war-ravaged country.

The Iraqi government would soon discuss such a proposal with the new UN special envoy to Iraq, interior minister spokesman Sabah Kadhim said.

The security situation in Iraq is such that there are a lot of vacuums across the country which breeds undesirable elements," he said.

To erase these vacuums what we need is more international police forces."



Pakistan Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat (back-L) stands with a group of children as they sing the national anthem in Islamabad yesterday during a ceremony to kick off the celebrations for the country's 57th anniversary of independence.

GUANTANAMO BAY TRIALS 4 detainees confirmed 'enemy combatants'

AP, Washington

A military review of the cases against four terror suspects held at the US Navy base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has concluded they are classified properly as enemy combatants and will not be freed, the official overseeing the process said Friday.

The four were the first cases, of 21 reviewed thus far, to be decided. There is no appeal.

In a change of policy, the Pentagon stopped on Friday the release of detainees' nationalities when their cases are heard. Nationalities, but not names, of the first 21 were released at their hearings, including five Thursday.

Lt. Cmdr. Becci Brenton, a spokeswoman for the review process, said the decision to stop providing nationalities was made after some countries objected to the release of that information.

Nationalities of those whose cases have been heard and decided starting with the four announced on Friday will be released afterward only if their home governments do not object, Brenton said.

Four additional cases were being heard Friday at Guantanamo Bay, raising the total to 25; their outcome was not expected to be known immediately.



Muslim women demonstrate outside the Home Office in London Friday. Members of the British Muslim community gathered to protest the erosion of civil liberties under the government's security policies after a secretive Special Immigration Appeals Commission rejected an attempt by ten detainees to win their freedom. Lawyers had argued that it was wrong to hold them under evidence possibly obtained through torture at US detention centers.

PHOTO: AFP