

Typhoon Aere makes landfall in SE China

BBC ONLINE

The typhoon which has been battering Taiwan has now made landfall in south-eastern China.

The authorities had evacuated 250,000 people from their homes in Zhejiang province, but Typhoon Aere struck southern Fujian province instead.

In Taiwan, Aere continued to trigger flooding on Wednesday, after reportedly killing five people on Tuesday.

At least 164 people lost their lives when the last typhoon, Rananim, hit China earlier this month.

Chinese state television, quoting the Central Meteorological Bureau, said the storm had hit the province of Fujian, which faces Taiwan, packing force 12 winds.

It is expected to head further west towards the densely populated province of Guangdong.

Its trajectory is further south than some had been predicting. It was the eastern province of Zhejiang, closer to Shanghai, which was expecting some of the worst battering from the storm.

Zhejiang is still picking up the pieces after the ferocious onslaught from Typhoon Rananim a few days ago.

Taking no chances, the authorities there said they had evacuated 250,000

people from their homes and ordered thousands of fishing boats back into port.

In Fujian the authorities have been taking their own precautions, such as postponing the registration procedures for college students.

But the BBC's correspondent in Shanghai, Francis Markus, says the coming hours will be a severe test of their readiness in the face of the storm.

"Torrential rain triggered by the coming typhoon may cause landslides and mud flows in mountainous areas," Gao Shuanzhu, chief forecaster at China's Central Meteorological Station, warned.

Aere was the fiercest typhoon to hit the country this year, dumping a metre and a half of rain in the mountains around Taipei, saturating land that was already unstable and triggering landslides.

The heavy downpours turned streets into muddy rivers, with floodwaters surging waist-high in some districts of Taipei.

The storm forced thousands to flee their homes and closed financial markets for a second day on Taiwan.

Some of the people trying to rebuild homes damaged by the last typhoon a few weeks ago were forced to flee again.



PHOTO: AFP

A flood scene at the main road in Manila yesterday. Four people were killed and three others were missing as heavy rains caused by typhoon Aere and super-typhoon Chaba triggered floods, landslide and road crash in the Philippines.

Moves on to woo Mamata back to Cong fold

SAKYASEN MITTRA, Kolkata

Both the Indian parties will deny that such a move is on. But the Congress is seriously trying to woo Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Bannerjee back into the party fold.

The Congress president Sonia Gandhi has entrusted this special task to party leaders Pranab Mukherjee and Salman Khurshid to win over Mamta. Both have already sent feelers to the Trinamool camp with proposals for a possible patch-up.

They have even gone to the extent of informing Mamata Bannerjee that she will head the Congress if she agrees to stage a comeback. She has also been assured that quite a few of the present group of leaders in the Congress in West Bengal will be sidelined.

But then why this sudden development! In the past both the Trinamool Congress and the Congress have shamelessly criticised each other in West Bengal. Both the parties were at odds and enjoying a relation like snake and mongoose.

But at present, Sonia Gandhi feels that the rejuvenation of the Congress in West Bengal is a must and cannot be attained without Mamata.

Palestinian intelligence chief shot in Gaza

Two bodyguards killed, MPs for revamping govt

REUTERS, AFP, Gaza

Gunmen ambushed the commander of the Palestinian intelligence service in the Gaza Strip yesterday, wounding him, killing two bodyguards and fueling fears of spreading chaos.

Brigadier-General Tareq Abu Rajab was acting boss of the General Intelligence Service since its head resigned last month amid unprecedented Palestinian unrest over demands for anti-corruption reform.

Rajab, 58, was close to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, but was not widely seen as taking sides in a power struggle that pits younger leaders -- who say they want change -- against an old guard accused of graft and failing to win a state.

The tussle for control has been triggered by Israel's plan to withdraw troops and settlers next year from the territory it has occupied since the 1967 war.

Gunmen fired from two moving cars

as Abu Rajab drove to his office in Gaza City, security sources said. Then they peeled off in different directions in what looked like a carefully plotted attack.

Two of Abu Rajab's bodyguards were killed and another wounded. Medics said the commander was in serious condition and undergoing surgery.

"It's a sinful crime and it is condemned by everybody. We are confident that the criminals will not escape punishment," Rashid Abu Shbak, head of internal security in the Gaza Strip, told Reuters after visiting Abu Rajab in hospital.

"The Palestinian Authority must carry out decisive procedures to stop the security deterioration, which has started to harm Palestinian leaders."

AFP adds: A parliamentary commission was set to urge a wholesale reshuffle of Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qorei's government at a session focusing on demands for reform, deputies said.

The much-anticipated session of the

Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) had been postponed for a day as veteran leader Yasser Arafat apparently stalled on demands by deputies to transform recent pledges to address "unacceptable mistakes" into action.

Deputies in particular want Arafat to order probes into allegations of corruption and clearly lay down the division of powers in the multifarious security apparatus which Arafat is supposed to have streamlined.

Qorei submitted his resignation to Arafat last month after an unprecedented spate of kidnappings. He later retracted after mediation efforts involving senior deputies.

Deputies passed a resolution last month urging Arafat to accept Qorei's resignation offer.

Qorei is expected to reshuffle his cabinet team in the next few weeks, having been given the green light for a shake-up from Arafat himself.



PHOTO: AFP

Palestinians gather around the car of the acting head of the Palestinian intelligence services which was attacked by gunmen as it headed towards his local headquarters in Gaza City yesterday. Tareq Abu Rajab was seriously wounded in the ambush near the Shatti refugee camp in the west of the city while two of his bodyguards were killed.

Nepali capital returns to normal

Maoists suspend week-long blockade

BBC ONLINE

Traffic is back on the roads in and around the Nepalese capital, Kathmandu, after Maoist rebels suspended a week-old blockade.

Two major highways linking the city with the rest of the country are bristling with the movement of passenger buses and trucks.

The rebels said they would lift the blockade after appeals from rights groups, businesses and Nepali citizens.

The blockade sent prices up and put pressure on the new government.

The rebels are demanding the release of detained comrades and investigations into how other colleagues died.

The blockade was imposed through the fear of reprisals, rather than any

physical roadblocks.

"I have waited for a week to return," Surya Gurung, a stranded government worker, told Associated Press. "It should be safe enough (now) for me to take back my family on the bus."

Ordinary citizens of Kathmandu were relieved that the blockade had been lifted.

"People were starting to suffer because of the blockade. We should be able to get food and fuel and prices of vegetables and other food should return to normal," college student Ram Thapa said.

"The rebels should refrain from imposing such blockades that leave thousands of people to suffer."

Analysts in Kathmandu say that mentioning a time limit is likely to be a face-saving measure on the part of the rebels.

"This was a high-risk strategy for the Maoists. They tried to feel the pulse of the people but they paid a high price in alienating the common people of Kathmandu," human rights activist Kapil Shrestha told the French news agency AFP.

Others say the month-long suspension of the blockade also gives the government more time to resume peace talks with the rebels.

"Secretly the government is surely doing its homework to make sure negotiations are successful," political scientist Lok Raj Baral said.

The Nepali government has said it will investigate what happened to a number of left-wing activists who have disappeared over the past few months -- a key demand of the rebels. It has refused to free the detained suspects.

I stood up against Vietnam war: Kerry

REUTERS, Philadelphia

John Kerry Tuesday firmly defended his outspoken opposition to the Vietnam War, saying when the United States was in moral crisis over the conflict in the 1970s "I stood up and was counted."

Confronting an issue that has embittered some veterans and helped fuel an election year attack on his military service, the Massachusetts senator said voters "can judge my character" by his Vietnam record.

"Because when the times of moral crisis existed in this country, I wasn't taking care of myself. I was taking care of public policy. I was taking care of things that made a difference to the life of this nation," Kerry told a fund-raiser in this critical battleground state.

"You may not have agreed with me, but I stood up and was counted and that's the kind of president I will be," he added.

Earlier in New York, Kerry sought to put the dispute over how he earned his

medals and his conduct in war behind him, as he accused Bush of weakening the middle class and refusing to debate the real substantive issues facing Americans.

But in Philadelphia, he returned to the Vietnam controversy, which many Democrats fear is undercutting his challenge against Bush.

He said he served in Vietnam for two tours -- longer than opponents allege -- and the Navy "thought enough of my service that they made me an aide to an admiral."

Aides said his total service was about six months, including four months and 10 days in country and several weeks on a ship off the coast.

He was awarded a Silver Star, a Bronze Star and three Purple Hearts.

"The Navy 35 years ago made the awards that it made through the normal process. I'm proud of them and I'm of my service and I'm proud that I stood up against the war when I got home because it was the right thing to do," he added.

Embassies in Sweden receive threats

Honduras secures foreign missions

AFP, Stockholm

The Stockholm embassies of several countries with a military presence in Iraq have recently received threatening letters in Arabic, the Swedish foreign ministry said Tuesday.

"Five or six embassies have received a letter in Arabic concerning their presence in Iraq. We have forwarded the information to the Stockholm police," spokeswoman Maria Haakansson told AFP.

She did not specify which countries were concerned, but the Australian ambassador to Sweden, Richard Rowe, confirmed that his embassy had received a threatening letter.

"The letter has been sent to the relevant Australian authorities for analysis," he told the TT news agency.

The Swedish security services, Saepo, also said that a threatening letter was sent from Sweden to the Canadian embassy in the Philippines several weeks ago. The Canadian embassy in Stockholm was not among those receiving threatening letters.

ing threatening letters.

"For us, the facts do not suggest an emergency," said Margareta Linderöth, deputy head of the Swedish security services (Saepo), stressing that Canada has not been militarily involved in the US-led campaign in Iraq.

Meanwhile, elite "Cobra" police deployed Tuesday near the embassies of El Salvador, Britain and Spain, after al-Qaeda-linked groups threatened those countries for sending troops to Iraq, the security minister said in Tegucigalpa.

"The security measures are being reinforced at the missions of the countries involved in the Iraq situation," Security Minister Oscar Alvarez said.

On Monday, Salvadoran President Elias Antonio Saca requested extra security for the country's embassies around the world after receiving word of threats.

Maldives sets free 122 detainees

Amnesty visit welcomed

AP, Male

The Maldives government announced the release of more than 100 pro-democracy activists arrested during a massive protest in the capital earlier this month, saying it welcomes a visit by Amnesty International to verify the detainees were treated well.

A total of 185 people were detained after the unprecedented Aug. 13 anti-government protest. Security forces fired tear gas to disperse about 3,000 demonstrators who gathered outside the police headquarters the capital Male, in a crackdown that drew international criticism.

Dozens of protesters were wounded and the government declared a state of emergency.

In the statement seen yesterday, the government said police had freed 122 detainees as of Monday.

"The government has implemented

numerous reforms in the criminal justice system and to ensure that prisoners are treated well," chief government spokesman Ahmed Shaheed said in the statement.

Meanwhile, a European Union fact-finding team concluded its two-day visit to the Maldives during which it held talks with government officials and reformists. The six EU diplomats based in neighbouring Colombo, Sri Lanka, are likely to submit a written report later this week.

The government has called the demonstration a coup attempt -- a charge denied by the main opposition Maldivian Democratic Party.

President Gayoom has ruled this island nation of 278,000 people -- a popular tourist destination 500km India's coast -- with an iron fist since 1978.

Sudan rebels to follow AU talks agenda

AFP, Abuja

Rebel groups from Sudan's war-torn Darfur region agreed yesterday to accept an African Union agenda for peace talks with the Khartoum government, despite reservations to a clause referring to their demobilisation, negotiators said.

Rebel spokesmen said they would raise their objection to the idea of laying down their arms when the talks reached the appropriate point in the agenda, but that for now the negotiations would continue.

They were speaking after the third day of discussions broke up. The talks are due to resume on Thursday, at the Intern-ational Conference Centre in the Nigerian capital Abuja, delegates said.

Sudan's government will accept a larger African Union peacekeeping force in the Darfur region if the troops are used to contain and demobilise

rebel forces, the head of Khartoum's team at peace talks said Wednesday.

"They may need more forces besides the protection of the (AU) monitors to protect the cantonment of the rebels, and we agree about that," Agriculture Minister Majzoub al-Khalifa said during AU-sponsored peace talks in the Nigerian capital.

The Khartoum government would retain responsibility for the protection of civilians, he told reporters outside the conference centre where talks to end an 18-month rebel war were stalled on the issues of rebel demobilisation and sending in more AU troops.

Thatcher's son detained in S Africa over coup plot

AFP, Johannesburg

South African investigators yesterday arrested former British prime minister Margaret Thatcher's son Mark over his alleged involvement in a coup plot in Equatorial Guinea, the SAPA news agency reported.

Makhosini Nkosi, spokesman for the Scorpions elite investigating unit, told the news agency that Thatcher had been arrested in Cape Town.

"The Scorpions have arrested the son of a prominent former British politician. We are investigating charges of contravening the Regulation of Foreign Military Assistance Act," he said.

"This is in relation to the possible funding and logistical assistance in relation to the attempted coup in Equatorial Guinea. We have conducted a search and seizure operation at his home in Cape Town."



PHOTO: AFP

Wounded militiamen of radical Iraqi Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr rest in a room turned into a makeshift infirmary at the shrine of Imam Ali (RA) in the besieged holy Shia city of Najaf yesterday.