

Hurricane kills 33 in Caribbean

AFP, Montego Bay

Hurricane Ivan hurtled toward Jamaica yesterday after devastating the Caribbean island of Grenada, where up to 24 people died, and killing nine others in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and Tobago. The deadly storm packed winds of up to 230 kilometers (145 miles) per hour as it headed for Jamaica where the authorities ordered the population to rush to take emergency precautions before a predicted impact yesterday.

Ivan's powerful winds made it a category four storm on the five-level Saffir-Simpson scale.

Twelve people were confirmed killed on Grenada and the toll is expected to climb, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) said. A Trinidad radio station FM 95.5 said there were 24 dead in Grenada, but that was not immediately confirmed.

In the Dominican Republic, four youths drowned in rough surf churned by Ivan, civil defence officials said. There were also four dead in Venezuela, according to the national authorities, and one in Tobago.

Sadr aide slams Sistani for silence on politics

3 Lebanese shot dead in Baghdad

AFP, Basra

An aide of rebel cleric Moqtada Sadr yesterday lashed out at Iraq's Shia Muslim spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, for refusing to make public pronouncements on the interim government.

"Sistani has to talk and not to keep silent or his silence will be taken the wrong way. Some top clerics in Iran are talking about that," Sheikh Assad al-Basri told worshippers in this southern city.

"I'm not accusing Grand Ayatollah Sistani. All I'm saying is that wrong attitudes should be corrected," said the head of Sadr's office in Basra.

Showing pictures of Sadr supporters allegedly being tortured by Iraqi police, Basri compared the government to that of ousted dictator Saddam Hussein.

"It's like the beginning of a new Saddam-type era. This infidel government does not represent the

Iraqi people, therefore it is the duty of every good citizen to work to topple it," he said.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Abdulmahdi al-Karbalai, Sistani's representative in the holy city of Karbala, called for moral, ethical, political and administrative reform to allow Iraq to embrace stability and progress.

"New laws (need to) ensure honest leaders run the country, without abusing power for selfish gain ... or terrorising people," he said in a sermon, stressing that it was his personal view and not that of the elderly ayatollah.

Outside the Grand Mosque in Kufa, where militiamen loyal to Sadr were holed up for months before Sistani ordered them out, a representative of the radical cleric denounced its closure before up to 1,000 worshippers.

"I denounce the shutting of the Kufa mosque. We should exert every effort possible to save Moqtada Sadr as he is a God-

fearing man trying to serve the Iraqi people," said Sayed Hashim Raghif.

Meanwhile, three Lebanese, one of them a woman, were shot dead "in mysterious circumstances" in Baghdad Friday morning, the foreign ministry announced in Beirut.

Businessmen Georges Badine and Karim Khoury were gunned down with Khoury's wife at the home of one of them, the reports reaching the ministry said.

The two men ran a food import business with an Iraqi associate, which they had set up just a few months ago.

In the aftermath of last year's US-led invasion, many hundreds of Lebanese flocked to Iraq to do business or take jobs in the booming security industry.

But since insurgents began kidnapping foreigners in April, many have left, spurred on by government ban imposed in July on Lebanese working for security contractors in Iraq.

House votes to honour victims of Sept 11

AFP, Washington

The House of Representatives Thursday honored the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks and reaffirmed US resolve to fight terrorism around the world.

By a vote of 406 to 16, Congress' lower chamber passed a resolution extending "its deepest sympathies to the thousands of innocent victims of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, their families, friends, and loved ones."

The House committed itself to honor "the heroic actions and the sacrifices of United States military and civilian personnel and their families who have sacrificed much, including their lives and health, in defence of their country in the global war on terrorism," as well as firefighters and other "firstresponders."

Two days before the third anniversary of the attacks, lawmakers held a minute of silence in remembrance of the nearly 3,000 people who died in the attacks, and vowed that the United States "will continue to take whatever actions necessary to identify, intercept, and disrupt terrorists and their activities."



PHOTO: AFP

Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer (front R) tours the blast site outside of its country's embassy in Jakarta yesterday accompanied by ambassador David Ritchie (2nd L). Downer yesterday toured the scene of the attack on his country's embassy in Jakarta as investigations were under way into who carried out the bombing, which left at least nine people dead.



PHOTO: AFP

The World Trade Center site, the location of the former Twin Towers is viewed Thursday in New York City ahead of the third anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers.

Political edge to third Sept 11 anniversary

AFP, New York

The United States will pause today in sombre remembrance of the September 11 terror attacks, whose legacy looms large and unshakable over a presidential election just 53 days away.

Three years later, some of the emotional wounds inflicted by the traumatic events of that day have begun to heal, even as the multiple fallout from the destruction of the World Trade Center continues to reverberate around a changed world.

For Americans, the third anniversary comes just days after the death toll of US soldiers in Iraq crossed the symbolic 1,000 mark -- a grim reminder of the cost of the open-ended war on terror.

At home, fear of a fresh attack remains a potent force, with regular national alerts, simulated security exercises and, in the past week, shocking television images of the terrorist bombing in Jakarta and massacre of schoolchildren in Beslan, Russia.

And on Thursday, US television networks showed a video broadcast by al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri, vowing that defeat for US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan was a

matter of time.

Zawahiri last appeared in a video broadcast almost the same time a year ago, on the eve of the second September 11 anniversary, walking with Osama bin Laden in a green mountainous area.

As was the case with the past two anniversaries, New York City will be the focus of Saturday's remembrance events, with a ceremony at Ground Zero featuring parents and grandparents reading the names of the 2,749 victims of the World Trade Center attack.

The reading will pause at four moments: twice to mark the times that each plane hit the towers and twice more to mark the times each tower fell.

And later in the evening, in what looks set to become an annual tribute, two powerful spotlights will send two shafts of light up into the night sky to symbolise the fallen twin towers.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld will lay a wreath at the national Arlington Cemetery in memory of the 184 people who died when another hijacked plane was flown into the Pentagon.

Pak troops mop up tribal belt operation

10 more militants killed

REUTERS, Wana

Pakistani forces conducted mop-up operations yesterday in the South Waziristan tribal region bordering Afghanistan, a day after 50 Islamic militants were killed in an air strike on a training camp.

Another 10 fighters, mostly foreigners, died in clashes with government troops on Thursday, making it one of the bloodiest attacks on al-Qaeda-linked militants since Pakistan sent tens of thousands of troops into lawless tribal areas last year.

Military spokesman Major-General Shaukat Sultan said no high-level al-Qaeda operatives had been killed in the raid involving jet fighters and helicopter gunships.

Speaking to reporters in the northwestern city of Peshawar, he also denied residents' reports that dozens of civilians died in the attacks.

"I am giving you an explicit statement that there were no civilian casualties, including women and

children," he said.

Six bodies were recovered from the separate gun battle on Thursday, five of them foreigners. The remains of one local man were returned to Pakistani tribesmen, many of whom sympathize with al-Qaeda and have fought to protect them in recent clashes.

Most of the 50 militants killed in the training camp were foreigners, including Uzbeks, Chechens, and Arabs, Sultan said.

He added that the military had suffered casualties during the fighting, but declined to give details. The authorities have been slow to admit losses among forces in the past.

Islamic militants are outraged by Pakistan's decision to support the US-led war on terror, and al-Qaeda-linked operatives have been blamed for failed assassination attempts on the president, prime minister and a corps commander in Karachi.

Officials say members of the group behind the Karachi attack trained and planned in tribal areas, and some al-Qaeda operatives

caught during a swoop on the network in recent months also visited the region.

Sultan described the site targeted on Thursday, in Dila Khura 15 miles northeast of the town of Wana, as a training camp where foreign militants were actively engaged in learning how to use weapons and make bombs using electronic circuits.

Authorities were led to the camp on the basis of information received from around 10 al-Qaeda suspects who authorities say were planning a series of bomb attacks in major cities close to independence day on August 14. Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed told reporters in Karachi that 150 to 300 foreign militants remained in the South Waziristan tribal region 250 miles southwest of the capital Islamabad.

He repeated a government offer of amnesty by which foreign fighters, some of whom fled Afghanistan when the US launched its war on the Taliban in 2001, could register with the authorities and go free if they denounced militancy.

Sudan, West in war of words over genocide charge

REUTERS, Nairobi

Sudan and Western powers plunged into a war of words over Darfur yesterday, with Khartoum countering US charges of genocide by saying Washington was playing electoral politics with a humanitarian crisis.

Sudan's Islamist rulers said a finding by President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell of genocide in Darfur was "an isolated position" made in the heat of a presidential election to win African-American votes. "They should not use a humanitarian problem for political agenda," Foreign Minister Mustafa Osman Ismail told Reuters during a visit to South Korea.

"We know that an election is going on. We know the political parties, the Republicans and

Democrats, are competing for the votes of African-Americans," Ismail said.

Rebels began an uprising in Darfur in February 2003 after years of skirmishes between mainly African farmers and Arab nomads over land and water. The government turned to Arab militias to help suppress the rebels.

The United Nations estimates 1.2 million people have fled their homes and up to 50,000 people have died from direct violence, starvation or illness in what it describes as the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The United States declared on Thursday the violence in Darfur region amounted to genocide and urged the world to back an expanded African peacekeeping force to halt the bloodshed.

The move, raising the political temperature of efforts to end the crisis, has little legal import, analysts say.

But the determination may influence a UN Security Council debate on a US-proposed resolution that threatens sanctions on Sudan's budding oil industry, which pumps about 320,000 barrels per day, if Khartoum does not stop the abuses.

Britain backed its main ally by saying genocide may have occurred in Sudan, and supported Washington's call for a United Nations investigation of abuses in the Darfur region.

But Chris Mullin, junior foreign minister, said London was wary of jeopardising progress that has been made in Sudan.

Yemeni troops kills rebel cleric in clash

AFP, Sanaa

Yemen's army on Friday killed an anti-US Muslim preacher who styled himself as a "Prince of Believers" and led a near three-month bloody rebellion against the authorities from the mountainous north of the country.

The defence and interior ministries said in a joint statement that the death of Sheikh Hussein Badr Eddin al-Huthi had brought the deadly rebellion to an end and that all military operations in the vast Saada province near the border with Saudi Arabia had now ceased.

Some of the rebel preacher's supporters were also killed while others surrendered, the statement said.

A defence ministry source told AFP that Huthi had been hiding out

with supporters in a cave in Jarf Salman, a village in the rugged mountains of Maran, which lies in Saada, and was killed during the culmination of three days of intense fighting.

Jarf Salman had been under siege since late August as the army closed in on Huthi, a cleric from the Zaidi Muslim sect, and his armed supporters.

The source said Huthi's top aide Abdullah Ayedh al-Razami and his supporters were still being pursued in the towns of Nashoor and Al-Shaftiya, both right on the border with Saudi Arabia.

Witnesses in the area told AFP that clashes continued until late Thursday between those holed out with Razami and the army.

Military sources said they expect Razami to be arrested within days.

BJP starts roadshow ahead of state polls

AFP, New Delhi

Firebrand Hindu nationalist leader Uma Bharti began a nationwide tour yesterday to woo voters for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ahead of crucial elections in one of India's biggest states.

Bharti, 43, who dresses in saffron robes, is known for her fiery speeches and is one of the rising stars of the BJP, which ruled India until May when the communist-backed Congress party swept it from power in national polls.

Her 4,000-kilometer (2,480-mile) month-long tour starting from Hubli, in southern Karnataka state, was flagged off by India's opposition leader Lal Krishna Advani.

"The yatra (journey) will focus on three issues -- nationalism, probity in public life and the campaign against pseudo-secular forces," said Advani, handing Bharti the Indian flag.

Bharti was released from jail last week after authorities dropped charges against her of inciting a Hindu-Muslim riot a decade ago in the southern state of Karnataka. Five people died when police fired to disperse the mobs.



PHOTO: AFP

Israeli soldiers arrest a Palestinian woman at the Hawara checkpoint at the entrance of the West Bank city of Nablus during a high alert in the area Thursday. The woman was arrested on suspicions of planning an attack in Israel.

Settlers warn of 'civil war' over pullout

Hamas man killed

AFP, Gaza City

A Hamas militant was killed yesterday as Israel pressed on with a major offensive in the northern Gaza Strip Friday and imposed a watertight closure on the Palestinian territories ahead of the Jewish New Year.

Right-wing Jewish settlers meanwhile warned of "civil war" over Israel's planned pullout from the Gaza Strip and urged Israeli soldiers and police not to take part in what they said would be a "crime against humanity."

A local Hamas chief was killed as clashes between Palestinian militants and Israeli troops continued for a third straight day in the Jabaliya area of northern Gaza, Palestinian security sources and medics said.

Abdelaziz Al-Ashqar, 34, was killed and 10 other Palestinians injured in a number of incidents in the Jabaliya area, including three who suffered wounds when an Israeli helicopter fired a rocket, the sources said.

The latest death brought the overall toll since the September 2000 start of the Palestinian Intifada to 4,300, including 3,286 Palestinians and 943 Israelis, according to an AFP count.

Israel launched a major raid into the northern Gaza Strip on Wednesday to try to stop militants firing makeshift rockets across the border into southern Israel.

But on Friday, three rockets landed in the Israeli town of Sderot and the Negev desert but without causing any injuries or damage, military sources said.

Overnight, Israel enforced a strict closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to prevent possible Palestinian attacks ahead of the two-day Jewish New Year celebrations which start Wednesday.

Army radio said the closure would probably be extended until after the feast of Tabernacle -- Sukkot in Hebrew -- which ends on October 7. Such closures have become standard procedure following the outbreak of the Intifada.