

53 pilgrims drown in Madhya Pradesh flash flood

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Bhopal

Fifty-three bodies were fished out until yesterday from the Narmada river in Madhya Pradesh, and officials said many were still missing, three days after they were washed away when water was suddenly released from a big dam upstream.

from the Indira Sagar dam, 100 km upstream, leading to the levels rising and people being washed away.

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Babulal Gaur visited Dharaji on Monday to take stock of the situation and said families of those killed would get a compensation of Rs100,000 each from the state government.

The Madhya Pradesh government has asked Arvind Joshi, principal secretary in the water resources department, to probe the incident and submit a report within 15 days.

The Narmada Hydroelectric Development Corporation (NHDC), which controls the Indira Sagar dam, has said that it is not responsible for the accident.

"We released the water as we do every day. We were never told by the district administration of Dewas that people would be taking a dip in the river that night," said an NHDC senior official.

Water was suddenly released

India pledges not to allow anti-China acts

Beijing backs Delhi's UNSC berth

AFP, New Delhi

India, which has a large population of Tibetan exiles, said yesterday it recognised that Tibet is part of China and pledged not to allow its territory to be used for anti-China political activities.

In return, China formally accepted that Sikkim state is part of "the Republic of India".

The pledges were contained in a joint statement issued after talks between visiting Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh in New Delhi.

"Both sides reviewed with satisfaction the implementation of the memorandum on the border trade through the Nathula Pass between the Tibet Autonomous Region of the Peoples Republic of China and the Sikkim State of the Republic of India," a joint statement said.

India first acknowledged Tibet as part of China during a visit by then prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to Beijing in 2003.

At the same time China agreed to trade with India through the strategic Nathu La pass in Sikkim, which Indian officials interpreted as Beijing giving up its territorial claim over the tiny Himalayan state.

"The Indian side reiterated that it recognised the Tibet Autonomous Region as part of the territory of the Peoples Republic of China and that it did not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-China political activities in India," Monday's joint statement said.

"The Indian side recalled that India was among the first countries to recognize that there is one China and its one China policy remains unaltered. The Indian side stated it would continue to abide by its one

China policy.

"The Chinese side expressed its appreciation for the Indian positions," it added.

Meanwhile, China will support India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded UN Security Council, according to an Indian government document seen by AFP.

"China understands and supports the aspirations of India to become a permanent member of the Security Council," said the document, drawn up after a meeting Sunday between Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei and Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran.

"If the Indian side expresses its aspirations, the Chinese side will be happy to see this outcome," it added.



Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao (L) and his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh shake hands holding delegation reports during the signing of a joint declaration. The South Asian giants have inked 11 agreements in New Delhi yesterday aimed at resolving their boundary dispute.

Israel asks Abbas to put an end to rocket attacks

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel was piling pressure on Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas to put a halt to rocket attacks by militant groups in the Gaza Strip ahead of a summit yesterday between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and US President George W. Bush in Texas.

A deadly flare-up of violence over the weekend, which saw three Palestinian youths shot dead by Israeli troops, brought tensions between the two sides to their highest point since a summit more than two months ago when both Sharon and Abbas called for an end to hostilities.

Palestinian militants responded to the death of the three youths by lobbing more than 70 rockets and

mortars at Jewish settlements and Israeli troop positions in Gaza.

While no one was injured by the barrage, the Israeli government is furious that Abbas and his security services appeared to have not lifted a hand to stop the attacks.

Sharon was likely to use his meeting with Bush to argue that Abbas was failing to honour commitments to rein in the militants, a point that his Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz made in person to the Palestinian leader in a late-night phone call.

"This can't continue," Mofaz was quoted as telling Abbas.

"You aren't doing what needs to be done, and Israel won't accept this. If you don't act quickly, who knows how badly this will deteriorate?" Sharon described the firing as "a

flagrant violation of the understandings" reached with Abbas at their summit in February, with an aide to the Israeli leader quoting him as saying that "it will be a central issue to be raised at my talks with President Bush".

The summit at Bush's Texas's ranch, an invitation which underlines the close alliance between the US and Israeli leaders, is designed to highlight Washington's support for the upcoming pullout of troops and settlers from Gaza.

Bush's support for Sharon's so-called disengagement plan is seen as a vital counter-balance to domestic opposition from many of the Israeli leader's one-time allies.

Nuclear experts meet Pak officials amid black market worry

AFP, Islamabad

International anti-proliferation experts met Pakistani officials for the first time yesterday, amid concern about a nuclear black market run by the disgraced father of the country's atomic bomb.

Pakistan has been under a strict embargo by the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which includes the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia and other key atomic powers, since testing its first nuclear warhead in 1998.

The South Asian nation has said it wants to join the 44-nation group despite a continuing probe into the activities of scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan. He has admitted giving nuclear technology to North Korea, Iran and Libya.

The Nuclear Suppliers Group met Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan, the top civil servant in the foreign office, a ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

They also held talks with other officials including additional secretary Tariq Usman Haider. "The meeting with Haider, who deals with nuclear-related matters, lasted about an hour," the official said.

More talks may be held tomorrow, officials said.

Islamabad's bid to join the group is likely to face major difficulties because Pakistan is not a party to the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Nor is its rival India or suspected nuclear-armed power Israel.

Nepal extends sweeping detention powers

Deuba calls for more int'l pressure to end king's rule

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's King Gyanendra, who seized power more than two months ago, has extended for six months a law passed in 2001 which gives authorities sweeping arrest and detention powers, an official said yesterday.

The Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Ordinance or TADO was introduced by a civilian-led government to combat an increasingly deadly Maoist insurgency. It has been extended on a six-monthly basis ever since.

"The king has given his assent to the extension of TADO for the next six months," the senior home ministry official said, requesting anonymity.

On February 1 Gyanendra dismissed a multi-party government led by Premier Sher Bahadur Deuba and seized control of Nepal, vowing to tackle the Maoist revolt that has claimed 11,000 lives since 1996.

TADO authorises security officials to hold anyone suspected of involvement in guerrilla activities for up to six months as well as to search residences.

Government officials say the act is needed to fight the rebels but human rights groups say it has led to widespread human rights abuses.

Meanwhile, Nepal's former premier who was sacked by King Gyanendra for failing to crush a Maoist revolt has called for greater international pressure on the monarch to restore democracy in the

Himalayan kingdom. "We are in really deep trouble, our people are suffering," Sher Bahadur Deuba said in an interview published Monday in The Times of India.

"There has to be much greater international pressure (on Gyanendra to give up power)," said Deuba, speaking to the newspaper in Kathmandu.

Nepal authorities freed Deuba last month after six weeks of house arrest.

The country's political parties have been virtually muzzled by emergency rule imposed by the king February 1 outlawing freedom of speech and police have quickly broken up demonstrations to protest Gyanendra's power grab.

Fresh killing raises tension in Lanka

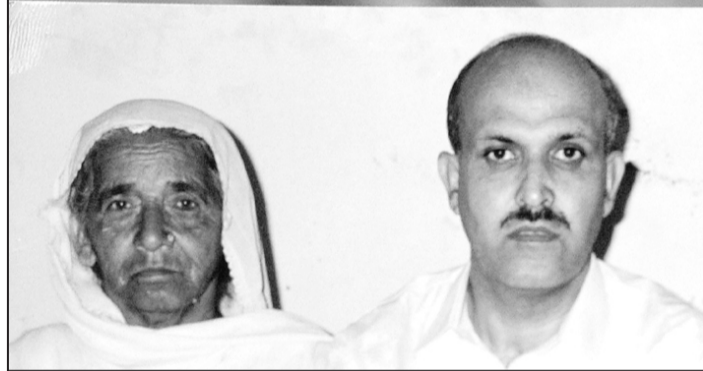
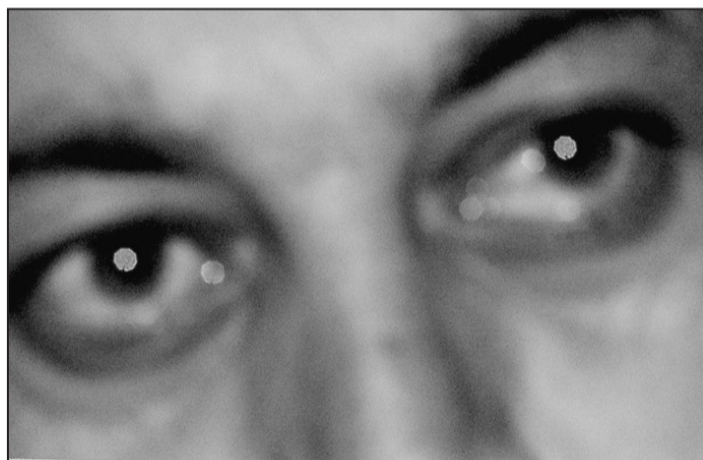
AFP, Colombo

An unidentified gunman shot dead a Tamil political activist in Sri Lanka's restive northeast yesterday, further fuelling tension in the region.

Wijedasan Wijendran was gunned down as he returned from a Hindu temple in the town of Trincomalee, police said, adding that they suspected Tamil Tiger rebels may have been responsible.

Security was tightened in the already strictly-guarded town after the shooting. The navy had previously raised an alert in the region.

The Sunday Times newspaper reported that the navy issued the alert amid fears of fresh attacks and warned that rebels could hit installations like Colombo's port and Trincomalee's harbour.



A relative displays a photograph featuring Pakistani national Malik Muhammad Javed (R-in the photo) pictured with his aunt in Islamabad Sunday. Javed, a non-diplomatic member of the Pakistani diplomatic mission in Iraq, was kidnapped whilst on his way to prayer in Baghdad and the Pakistani government was making the "utmost efforts" to ensure his release.

3 suicide bombs hit US military position in Iraq

Pak govt intensifies move to free embassy employee

AFP, Baghdad

Three suicide car bombs hit a US military position in a restive area of western Iraq near the Syrian border yesterday, wounding at least two soldiers.

"What we have right now is three confirmed suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices," First Lieutenant Kate VandenBossche, a spokeswoman for the US marines, told AFP.

She said two soldiers were injured in the early morning attack on the Camp Gannon forward operation base, adding: "We are still trying to determine if the casualties were coalition or Iraqi security forces."

Qaim, where insurgents are suspected of regularly crossing into Iraq from Syria, is the site of frequent clashes between rebels and US forces. It lies about 300km west of Baghdad in Al-Anbar province.

"The blast was incredible," said Iraqi police Lieutenant Yasir al-Hadithi, adding that US helicopters were hovering over the scene of the attack which was followed by the sound of heavy gunfire.

Underscoring the relentless violence that plagues Iraq two years since the fall of Saddam's regime, the family of Malik Muhammad Javed, a Pakistani embassy official abducted in Baghdad two days ago, were in tears over his fate.

He went missing Saturday after going to a mosque for evening prayers.

"They are all crying and consoling each other," said Javed's elder son, Bilal Malik, at the family's home in Islamabad.

Pakistan's information minister Sheikh Rashid said his government has intensified its efforts to release Javed, who did not hold diplomatic status.

His captors had placed "some conditions" on his release, Rashid said. "In the interest of the safety of our man and not to undermine the chances of his release, it would not be appropriate to reveal their demands," he said.

But an unnamed official told AFP the kidnapers had demanded an unspecified amount of money.



People gather along the streets in Padang Sunday after an earthquake measuring 6.7 on the Richter scale struck off the west coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island. There were no reports of casualties or damage from the quake.

Tokyo rocked by strong quake, reviving fears of 'The Big One'

AFP, Tokyo

A major earthquake measuring 6.1 on the Richter scale rattled Tokyo as commuters headed to work early yesterday, reviving fears of the dreaded "Big One" predicted to hit Japan in the future.

The quake was the biggest since a tremor of equal magnitude hit the Kanto region centring on Tokyo in June 2000, but there were no reports of major damage or casualties.

It struck at 7:22 am (2222 GMT Sunday), with the focus located 52km underground in the northeastern part of Chiba prefecture, some 100km east of Tokyo.

There was no danger of the quake causing tsunami waves, the meteorological agency said.

The quake occurred in a geological hotbed of quakes, where powerful earthquakes registering 6.0 on the Richter scale or greater have taken place repeatedly, said Masahiro Yamamoto, monitoring chief of earthquakes and tsunamis at the agency.

But a major aftershock was unlikely, he said.