

Katrina adds to public doubts about bush

AP, Washington

Hurricane Katrina did more than wipe out much of the Mississippi coastline and flood New Orleans. The storm and the bungled government response eroded President Bush's political standing and dampened enthusiasm for his second-term agenda.

An AP-Ipsos poll shows a sharp increase since the storm in the percentage of people who are most worried about the economy. Fewer than half approve of Bush's handling of Katrina, and almost two-thirds question the amount of money spent by the administration on the Iraq war.

"The problem is not Katrina, the root of the problem is Iraq," said Chris DePino, a Republican consultant in New Haven, Conn. "The Katrina issue is complicating the public relations nightmare that is Iraq."

DePino praised Bush but said, "It is very hard to put a good face on death and destruction."

Demonstration against British troops in Basra

Iraqi PM to meet Britain's defence chief

AFP, REUTERS, Basra, London

Hundreds of Iraqis, including policemen in uniform, protested Wednesday against the presence of British troops in the southern city of Basra after a police station was stormed to free two British soldiers.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari, meanwhile, was to hold talks in London, where public concern has been on the rise over Britain's deployment in southern Iraq.

"We condemn the illegal acts of British troops," read a banner carried by the demonstrators, who numbered around 300, gathered outside Basra's main police headquarters.

"No, no to the occupier," they chanted, carrying banners which called for the return of the two soldiers to face Iraqi justice, while British troops who patrol the port city kept out of sight.

US-led coalition troops are not subject to Iraqi law.

The demonstrators handed in a list of demands to the police headquarters, including the resignation of the provincial police chief, accusing him of being "an agent" of the British.

"The British promised us sovereignty. So where is this sovereignty if they destroy a police station?" asked one demonstrator.

The demonstration ended peacefully after their demands were delivered for British troops to hand back the two soldiers to be tried in an Iraqi court, along with compensation for the damaged police station.

British forces on Monday stormed the station to free the two soldiers, who were arrested by police after a shooting incident in the town.

The two bearded men had apparently been working undercover as they were wearing Arab clothing and driving a civilian car at the time of arrest.

Britain Defence Secretary John Reid was due to hold talks later Wednesday with Jaafari, the British defence ministry said, that were likely to focus on the events in Basra.

Iraq issued a statement saying there was no crisis between its government and Britain, but senior Iraqi officials strongly criticized the raid, with the governor of the southern province of Basra calling it a "barbaric act."

"Both governments are in close contact, and an inquiry will be conducted by the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior into the incident," a statement from Prime Minister Ibrahim Jaafari's office said. It also urged calm on all sides.

Reid, under pressure over the deployment of 8,500 troops in Iraq and facing calls for a withdrawal timetable, told a British newspaper, "We do not have designs to stay (in Iraq) as an occupying imperial power. Nor are we going to cut and run because of terrorists."



Iraq police commandos shout slogans during an anti-Britain demonstration in the southern Iraqi city of Basra 21 September 2005. Around 300 Iraqis, including policeman, protested in Basra to demand that two British soldiers freed in a British military raid be returned to face Iraqi justice.

Sri Lanka extends state of emergency

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's parliament Wednesday extended by a further month the state of emergency imposed shortly after the assassination of Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar.

Parliament voted 118 for and 24 against the tough laws that allow security forces and police to arrest and detain suspects for long periods without a warrant from a magistrate.

The ruling party and its allies as well as the main opposition voted for the extension of the emergency while legislators from the minority Tamil community opposed the measure.

The emergency was imposed shortly after the August 12 assassination of Kadirgamar. The government accused Tiger rebels of being responsible, a charge rejected by the guerrillas.

Police have already arrested two men allegedly involved in the gunning down of the minister as he emerged from his swimming pool at his private home here.

Koizumi vows more reforms

AFP, Tokyo

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi pledged Wednesday to push ahead with more privatization after he breaks up the powerful post office as parliament got to work following his landslide election victory.

Koizumi, fresh from a campaign he waged on breaking up Japan Post, said his government would also set its sights on other reforms including decentralization of power and changes to the tax system.

"There is no end to reforms," Koizumi said after parliament convened for a 42-day special session and promptly re-elected him in a party-line vote.

"First, we will work for the legislature to pass the postal reforms," Koizumi told a press conference. "Then, we will press forward on our principles to privatize what can be privatized and decentralize what can be done by local authorities."

Japan Post is the world's biggest financial institution with three trillion dollars in savings and insurance assets. The premier cast privatizing the politically powerful institution as a litmus test for reform after calling the September 11 snap election.



Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (C) and his cabinet members Shoichi Nakagawa (L), Economy, Trade and Industry Minister and Sadakazu Tanigaki (R), Finance Minister pose for photographers after they attested before Emperor Akihito at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo yesterday.

Andhra flood situation grim, toll reaches 50

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Hyderabad

The flood situation in Andhra Pradesh of India worsened on Wednesday with reports of about 50 people killed, thousands evacuated and hundreds of villages inundated as major rivers overflow their banks.

While the death toll has climbed to 50 as heavy rains battered the coastal regions for the last three days, many thousands have been evacuated and many more are waiting for help in submerged villages, officials said.

With floods in two major rivers and heavy rains continuing, authorities fear that the situation might worsen further.

With most parts of the state receiving heavy rainfall, there were huge inflows into the Krishna river and its tributaries.

If the Krishna is flowing near the danger mark inundating more than 100 villages in Krishna and Guntur districts, the Godavari is also overflowing its banks leading to a grim situation in Khammam, East Godavari and West Godavari districts.

Bhadrachalam town and some 300 villages in Khammam are under water while 100 villages in East and West Godavari districts have been inundated. Water levels at Dowlesw-

aram Barrage at Rajmud-dry town crossed danger mark on Tuesday night. And more than 2.2 million cuces of water has been let into the sea submerging 50 villages downstream.

Water has entered several localities in Vijayawada city and inundated National Highway 9, which connects the main towns of Hyderabad, Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam to Chennai and Kolkata. Thousands of vehicles have been stranded on the highway.

The situation is no different in Guntur district where more than 50 villages have been inundated. Authorities are using boats to rescue people while two helicopters of the Indian Air Force have also been pressed into service.

The weather office has forecast more rains in Telangana and coastal Andhra during the next 48 hours as the low pressure area was moving from Chhattisgarh to Ramagundam in Karimnagar district.

Following incessant rains, transport services in the state have been thrown out of gear.

The National Highway Nine, connecting Hyderabad to Vijayawada, Vishakhapatnam, Chennai and Kolkata, remained closed. Hundred of cars, buses and trucks were stranded for hours.

Israeli army completes WB pullout

AFP, Jerusalem

The Israeli army has announced its withdrawal from two more Jewish settlements, thus completing Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's historic pullout from the Gaza Strip and a small corner of the northern West Bank.

The army left the settlements of Ganim and Kadim -- the first two enclaves to be declared evacuated in August -- on Tuesday evening, the military said in a statement.

It pulled out of the nearby West Bank settlement of Sanur on Monday and Homesh last week.

On August 23, Sanur and Homesh became the last enclaves to be evacuated of Jewish settlers under Sharon's pullout plan.

Israeli military sources have stressed that unlike the Gaza Strip, the area evacuated in the northern West Bank will remain under Israeli control with soldiers continuing to patrol the district.

Hundreds of Palestinians swarmed into the evacuated Jewish settlement of Sanur in the northern West Bank on Tuesday after Israeli troops left the tiny enclave.

NORTH KOREA SAYS US using talks as pretext for attack

REUTERS, Seoul

North Korea accused the United States on Wednesday of using diplomatic talks to try and take away its nuclear arms so that Washington could crush the reclusive state with an atomic weapons strike.

The statement follows another by North Korea on Tuesday which threw into doubt a six-country deal on giving up its nuclear arms, just one day after it was struck.

In that statement the North vowed to keep the weapons until Washington provides it with civilian atomic reactors.

In a commentary on Wednesday in its official communist party newspaper, Pyongyang said Washington is waiting for a chance to attack.

"Clear is the ulterior intention of the U.S. talking about settlement of the nuclear issue through dialogue under the pretext of the six-party talks. In a word, it is to disarm the DPRK and stifle it with nuke," the paper said, according to a report carried on the official KCNA news agency.

DPRK is short for the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The commentary said the North "will steadily strengthen its war deterrent to defend national sovereignty and security with supreme vigilance."

The six countries agreed to a set of principles on Monday on winding up Pyongyang's nuclear programs in return for economic aid and recognizing its right to a civilian nuclear program.

The six agreed to discuss providing a light-water reactor "at an appropriate time." Washington pledged not to attack the North.

Washington has insisted that North Korea must completely, irreversibly and verifiably end its nuclear programs before consideration of a civilian nuclear program could begin.

North Korea has often said it was forced to develop nuclear weapons to counter what it saw as Washington's hostile policy toward it and has charged many times that Washington was going to attack it.

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