



Indian policemen carry out rescue operations as passengers stand outside torn carriages after a train derailed yesterday in Nalgonda district in India's southern Andhra Pradesh. More than 100 people were killed and 30 people went missing when a passenger train derailed and toppled into swirling floodwaters.

Bush brands Iran, Syria 'outlaw regimes'

UNSC puts finishing touches to resolution

REUTERS, AFP, Norfolk

President George W. Bush on Friday called Iran and Syria "outlaw regimes" and said countries that support terrorism are just as guilty of murder as those who commit the violence.

"We're determined to deny radical groups the support and sanctuary of outlaw regimes. State sponsors like Syria and Iran have a long history of collaboration with terrorists and they deserve no patience from the victims of terror," Bush said.

During the president's speech on terrorism, a heckler yelled: "Mr. President, what is terrorism? What is terrorism? Step down now." The man was escorted out and others in the

audience booed the heckler.

The United States has repeatedly expressed concern over Iran and its nuclear energy programme, which it suspects could be a cover for nuclear weapons development. Iran insists the programme is intended for civilian electricity generation.

And Western countries condemned recent comments by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad calling for Israel to be wiped off the map.

Last year, the United States and its allies, in fighting proliferation of deadly weapons, "have stopped more than a dozen shipments of suspected weapons technology including equipment for Iran's ballistic missile programme,"

Bush said.

"This progress has reduced the danger to free nations, but it has not removed it," he said. "Evil men who want to use horrendous weapons against us are working in deadly earnest to gain them. And we are working urgently to keep weapons of mass murder out of the hands of the fanatics," Bush said.

Meanwhile, a revised Franco-US draft resolution demanding full cooperation from Damascus with the probe into the murder of Lebanon's ex-premier is likely to be ready for a vote by the UN Security Council Monday, diplomats said Friday.

The United States and France said they had made good progress in

securing broad support for the text, which is co-sponsored by Britain.

Despite lingering opposition from some members to the mention of sanctions against the Syrian state specifically, the co-sponsors said they were confident the draft would be approved by most Security Council foreign ministers when they gather at a special council session Monday.

The 15 council members huddled Friday to fine-tune the revised text of the Franco-US draft resolution, co-sponsored by Britain, which still threatens Syria with economic and diplomatic sanctions if it does not fully cooperate with the probe into the slaying of Lebanese former premier Rafiq Hariri last February.

Kashmir CM resigns as Congress takes over

AFP, Srinagar

Indian Kashmir Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed yesterday quit his post in accordance with a power-sharing pact with the Congress party, which will now rule the troubled state for the next three years, officials said.

"I have tendered my resignation to the governor," Sayeed told reporters outside the residence of State Governor S.K. Sinha in the Indian Kashmir summer capital Srinagar.

Sinha is India's top representative in Kashmir.

Ghulam Nabi Azad, India's urban development minister, will replace Mufti Mohammad Sayeed of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).

Sayeed was installed on November 2, 2002 in line with a power-sharing pact following landmark state elections in the Himalayan region.

UN warns of chilling winter in quake zone

REUTERS, Geneva

UN weather experts said on Friday unusually low temperatures and heavy snowfall would soon hit areas of Pakistani Kashmir, jeopardising efforts to feed and shelter survivors of the South Asian earthquake.

Aid agencies renewed appeals for funds to keep open a lifeline to the millions left homeless in remote parts of the Himalayas by the October 8 quake, many of them injured.

"The situation is getting more and more desperate," said the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) said that winter was only three weeks away and initial reports suggested the weather would be unusually cold in the stricken mountain areas.

KASHMIR QUAKE AID Indo-Pak officials talk opening of border

AP, Muzaffarabad

India and Pakistan began talks yesterday on an unprecedented opening of their disputed Kashmir border to help victims of the massive earthquake believed to have killed about 80,000 people.

Foreign Ministry officials were meeting in Islamabad to discuss whether to allow Kashmiris to cross the heavily militarised Line of Control, the cease-fire line that divides the Himalayan region over which the South Asian rivals have fought two wars. A joint statement was expected later Saturday after the talks.

Since Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf suggested allowing Kashmiris to help each other recover from the Oct. 8 quake, both

governments have shown a willingness to open the border but disagree how to do it, reflecting their mutual suspicion.

The 7.6-magnitude temblor killed about 78,000 people in Pakistan, most in the Pakistan-controlled portion of Kashmir. More than 1,300 people died on the Indian side. An estimated 3.3 million others were left homeless and fears for their lives are growing as winter closes in.

The latest in hundreds of aftershocks struck early Saturday, with a magnitude of 5.5 and centred in the quake zone, the US Geological Survey reported. There were no immediate reports of damage or injuries.

The head of the Indian delegation, Dilip Sinha, told reporters on arriving in Pakistan late Friday that the atmo-

sphere between Pakistan and India was positive and that "we hope to have useful talks."

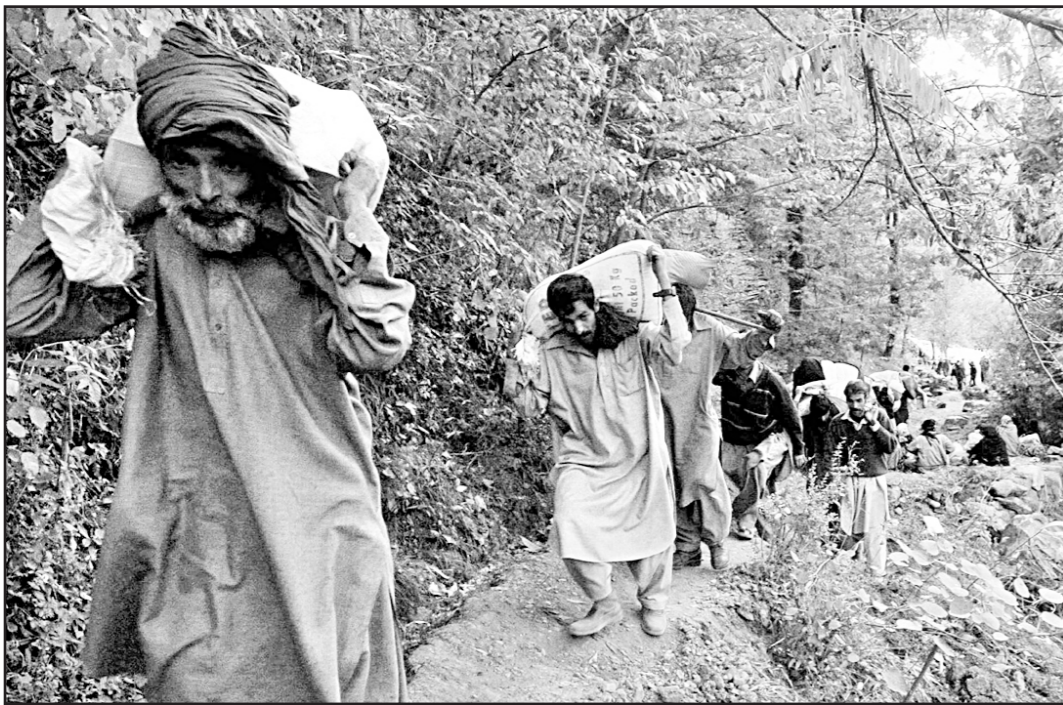
Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Tasnim Aslam also expressed optimism.

"Pakistan and India can reach an agreement after Saturday's talks for opening the Line of Control for Kashmiris so that they can meet with their relatives and friends without facing procedural difficulties," she said.

Crossing the land border in Kashmir was forbidden for 58 years until Pakistan and India agreed to a twice-monthly bus service earlier this year, one of the most tangible results so far of a two-year peace process to bury their history of acrimony and also settle their competing claims to Kashmir.



Dilip Sinha, (R) Joint Secretary of Indian External Affairs Ministry is guided by Ibne Abbas, (L) Pakistani Director General South Asia for Foreign Affairs Ministry prior to a meeting in Islamabad yesterday. Pakistani and Indian officials started talks on opening two-way movement across the disputed border in quake-ravaged Kashmir where thousands of survivors desperately await relief.



Earthquake survivors carry relief at Hattian Bala, some 40km from Muzaffarabad, capital of Pakistan administered Kashmir, Friday. Indian diplomats are in Pakistan for talks on getting relief across the frontier dividing quake-shattered Kashmir and saving the lives of thousands of survivors who are still at risk.

Quake succeeds where invaders fail

REUTERS, Muzaffarabad

Invaders over the centuries failed to bring down the walls of the Red Fort in the capital of Pakistani Kashmir, but the massive October 8 earthquake did so in seconds.

The 500-year-old fort looks north over the entrance to the Neelum valley, set on a point of land in a kink in its river and commanding an ancient route from the high Himalayas down to the lowlands.

"Enemies always failed to undermine this fort but we are helpless against nature," Mehmood ul Hasan, director of Pakistani Kashmir's information department, said as he surveyed the ruins of the devastated city's main historical site.

The epicentre of the 7.6 magnitude earthquake was just 10 km or so to the north. It killed more than 55,000 people in northern Pakistan,

most in Kashmir.

When the quake hit, many parts of the fort's thick walls of oval-shaped river stones and pinkish mortar crumbled, spilling out onto a main road running along one of its sides.

Six of its eight battlements and three ramparts have been destroyed, some debris tumbling into the Neelum river.

The main gates to the heart of the fort are locked and in the chaos after the quake, no one knows who has the key, but nimble visitors can scramble up a pile of collapsed wall stones, squeeze along a ledge and enter along a rampart.

All of the fort's corners, where torches were once fixed to light it, have collapsed. What was once a stable where more than 100 horses were kept has been reduced to rubble where stray dogs roam.

'Saddam accepted UAE exile plan to avert Iraq war'

REUTERS, Dubai

Deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had secretly accepted a last-minute plan to go into exile to avert the 2003 Iraq war, but Arab leaders shot the proposal down, Al Arabiya television reported on Friday.

UAE President Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahayyan made the proposal for Saddam to go into exile at an emergency Arab summit just weeks before the US-led war began in March 2003.

But the 22-member Arab League, led by Secretary-General Amr Moussa, refused to consider the initiative.

"We had got the final agreement from the different parties, the main players in the world and the person

concerned -- Saddam Hussein -- within 24 hours," Mohammed bin Zayed, deputy head of the UAE armed forces and crown prince of Abu Dhabi, told the UAE-based channel in a documentary.

"So we were coming to put facts on the table, and there would have been results had it been discussed," he said.

Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak says in the documentary that the United States had signalled its support for the proposal.

The documentary says the Iraqi delegation at the summit in Egypt had been unaware of Saddam's "secret consent" to the plan, which Iraqi Foreign Minister Najib Sabri dismissed as "silly."

3 Indonesian students beheaded

REUTERS, Jakarta

Three teenage Christian women were beheaded on Saturday by two assailants wearing helmets in eastern Indonesia as they walked to school near the Muslim town of Poso, officials said.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono condemned the killings, which he described as "sadist and inhuman crimes," and called an emergency security meeting with his vice-president, as well as military officials and police.

Two men on a motorcycle and armed with machetes attacked the 16-year-old students on the eastern island of Sulawesi, a police official in Poso told Reuters.

"The men slashed and chopped off their heads. One of the students managed to escape and jumped into the bushes in a ravine and the assailants stopped chasing her," said the official who declined to be identified.

Afghan violence kills 21

Two men dragged out of mosque and shot dead

AFP, Kabul/ Khost

Fresh violence killed 21 people in insurgency-hit Afghanistan including 14 suspected militants and three men shot dead during Ramadan prayers, officials said Saturday.

Four British soldiers travelling in the country's north were also wounded when gunmen opened fired on them, witnesses and officials said.

The militants were killed by US-led coalition and Afghan troops, supported by attack helicopters and aircraft, in battles on Thursday and Friday in which an Afghan soldier also died, the coalition said.

Thirteen were shot dead in insurgency-hit Uruzgan province, where the soldier was killed, it said in a statement. A US soldier and an Afghan trooper were wounded but were in stable conditions.

US troops killed another militant in eastern Paktika province Friday when he and others were spotted allegedly trying to plant a bomb, the coalition said.

Patrolling soldiers "came across the four individuals placing improvised explosive devices in the middle of the road," it said in a statement.

"US forces killed one individual attempting to escape and captured two others," the statement said. The

captured men were handed to Afghan police.

There are about 20,000 coalition troops in Afghanistan, most of them Americans, helping Afghan security forces root out Taliban and other insurgents waging a campaign against the government.

The insurgency was launched after the headline Taliban were removed from government in a US-led operation in late 2001 because they did not hand over Osama bin Laden for the September 11 attacks.

The coalition force is mainly based in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the focus of the attacks, while a separate Nato-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) of about 10,000 soldiers patrols the capital and northern and western Afghanistan.

Four British soldiers with ISAF were wounded Saturday when gunmen opened fire on their vehicle in the relatively calm city of Mazar-i-Sharif, witnesses and ISAF said.

Attackers on a motorbike and in a car ambushed the unmarked ISAF vehicle in front of the city's famous Blue Mosque, witnesses said.

Onlookers captured four of the gunmen as they tried to flee and handed them to police, they said.

"Four UK soldiers have been injured and have been evacuated to

receive medical treatment," ISAF spokesman Captain Michele Cortese said in Kabul.

Across the country, in southeastern Paktia province, a dozen men dragged two worshippers from evening prayers on Friday and shot them dead, district chief Mirza Mohammed told AFP.

They "killed them outside the holy place and they disappeared," he said.

The 12 attackers entered a mosque on Friday in southeastern Paktia province, some 120km southeast of Kabul, and grabbed two men who were saying their evening Ramadan prayers, district chief Mirza Mohammed told AFP.

"The armed men got the two worshippers out of the mosque, killed them outside the holy place and they disappeared," he said.

A tribal elder was shot dead inside another mosque in neighbouring Khost province on Wednesday, police said Saturday.

The attacks were the latest on the devout country's mosques during the holy month of Ramadan, with three pro-government religious leaders killed in various provinces mid-October and a district chief shot while praying.

Indictment adds to White House woes

AP, Washington

These are dark days for the White House. And they could get darker.

Less than a year after winning reelection by a comfortable margin, President Bush's approval ratings are at the lowest since he took office in 2001 and he is being whipsawed this week by events, some of his own making.

The US death toll in Iraq hit 2,000 on Tuesday, a fresh reminder of the president's push to war over weapons of mass destruction that were never found.

A special prosecutor took aim at White House officials in an investigation into the leak of a CIA agent's identity, a disclosure that may have been part of a campaign to discredit an Iraq war critic. The vice president's chief of staff was indicted on five felony counts Friday, although top aide Karl Rove escaped charges for now.

An insurrection of the president's conservative political base forced the withdrawal of Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers on Thursday.

Consumer confidence dropped, home sales were down and the number of people who lost their jobs because of Hurricane Katrina climbed above the half-million mark.

"There are times when no matter what you do it seems to blow up in your face, whether it's self-inflicted or inflicted from the outside," said Democratic consultant Joe Lockhart, who was President Clinton's press secretary during the impeachment flap. In the face of such grim news, Bush is likely to follow the examples of Clinton and other embattled presidents and make a public display of his work ethic.

"The American people expect me to do my job, and I'm going to," Bush said, shrugging off the "background noise" of the CIA leak investigation.

White House officials have said they expect anybody indicted to leave the staff.

On Iraq, the president has given a series of speeches defending his war policies. The approval of a new Iraq constitution Oct. 15 is one of the few pieces of good news Bush has gotten this month.

The economy has been a baffling issue to Bush and his team. They have not figured out how to convince the public that the economy is doing as well as experts say. It's a hard sell when pension funds are going bankrupt, health care costs and gasoline prices are soaring and jobs are being shipped overseas.

Iran has no intention to attack Israel

UNSC slams Ahmadinejad's remarks

AFP, Tehran/ United Nations

Iran yesterday slammed the UN Security Council condemnation of its president's anti-Israeli remarks, which caused international outrage, but insisted there was no intention to attack the Jewish state.

Amid an escalating war of words over President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's comment that Israel should be "wiped off the map", Iran said that a UN Security Council statement that condemned the remarks was "unacceptable".

But the foreign ministry also moved to repair some of the considerable diplomatic damage wrought by the remarks, saying the Islamic republic was bound by its UN commitments and had no intention to attack Israel.

"The Islamic republic of Iran is committed to its engagements based on the UN charter and has never resorted to, nor threatened to resort to force against another country," the foreign ministry said in a statement quoted by the IRNA agency.

This was the first such comment by Tehran since the straight-talking hard-liner Ahmadinejad called for Israel to be "wiped off the map" on Wednesday at a conference entitled "The World without Zionism".

Tehran also expressed its anger at the swift condemnation by the UN Security Council overnight, alleging that the statement had been dictated by Israel.

"The declaration published by the Security Council -- proposed by the Zionist regime to cover its crimes and give an image at odds with reality -- is unacceptable," the foreign ministry said in a statement quoted by the agency.

The ministry expressed surprise that the Security Council did not condemn the threats of military action made against Tehran by the United States and Israel or the "crimes" of the Israeli regime.

An earlier draft of the statement, initiated by Britain, had suggested that the council "strongly condemns" the Iranian remarks but the word "strongly" was deleted in the final version to ensure across-the-board support.

Britain's UN envoy Emyr Jones Parry described Ahmadinejad's remarks as "appalling" and "totally out of keeping with the charter of the United Nations".

Iran has found itself on the receiving end of almost unanimous international outrage since Ahmadinejad's comments -- not just from its customary foes like the United States and Israel.

Britain, France and Germany -- who earlier this year engaged in intense talks with Iran over a deal for its nuclear programme -- have minced no words over their fury.

But even close allies like Venezuela have distanced themselves from the comments while Russia -- a key backer of Iran's controversial nuclear programme -- has expressed its displeasure.

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council on Friday condemned Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's comment that Israel should be "wiped off the map", a move immediately welcomed by the Israeli ambassador.

"The Security Council condemns the remarks about Israel attributed to Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran," said a statement read by the president of the council, Romanian ambassador Mihnea Motoc.