

Andhra train crash toll rises to 123

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Hyderabad

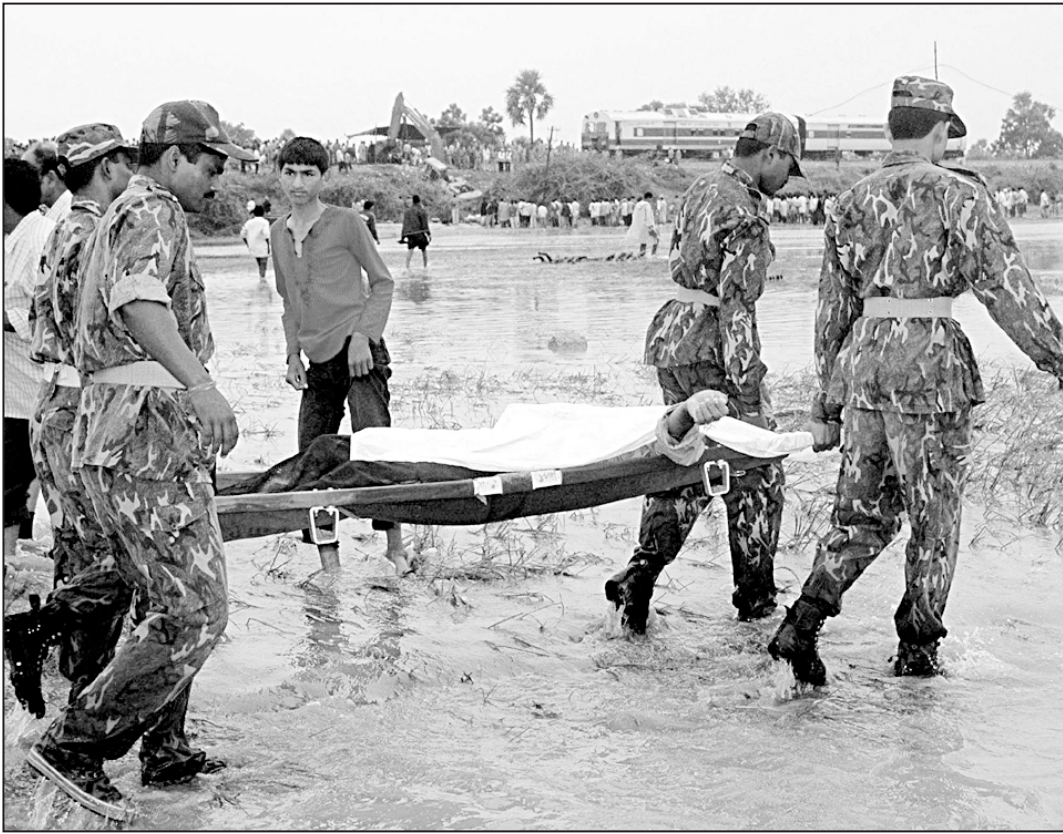
The death toll in one of the worst train disasters in Andhra Pradesh on Sunday rose to 123 as eight more bodies were recovered from the badly mangled coaches of a derailed passenger train.

Local people and activists pulled out eight bodies from bushes and muddy waters of a rivulet into which the train fell, as rescue work resumed early on Sunday.

The Repalle-Secunderabad Delta Passenger train derailed and plunged into a rivulet due to breaches on the track caused by gushing waters from two overflowing reservoirs following heavy rains in the region.

The accident occurred on Saturday near Veligonda, about 80 km east of Hyderabad in Nalgonda district.

Rescue teams from the army, railways, fire brigade and police, which had called off rescue efforts on Saturday due to darkness and bad weather, began cutting through three remaining compartments with the help of gas cutters.



Indian soldiers evacuate yesterday a body on a stretcher at the site where a passenger train derailed Saturday in the Nalgonda District of India's southern Andhra Pradesh state.

PHOTO: AFP

'US death toll in Iraq much higher than reported'

AFP, Dubai

The number of invading troops killed in Iraq is at least ten times higher than the published toll of 2,000, the Iraqi branch of the al-Qaeda terror network claimed Saturday.

"We are not exaggerating when we say that the number of deaths in the ranks of the crusader army is ten times higher than the 2,000 announced in the pernicious media," the group said in a website statement.

"Their forces have encountered difficulties disposing of the corpses which they are burying in mass graves in the desert, throwing in the rivers, or incinerating," the message continued.

No evidence was offered for the claims.

Three US soldiers were killed Saturday in two incidents in Iraq, the US military announced Saturday, as two more US servicemen were reported dead in neighbouring Kuwait.

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY SAYS

Escalation of ME violence is over

AFP, Jerusalem

The Palestinian Authority yesterday announced an end to an escalation of violence following contacts with militants, Israel and the United States, a spokesman for Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas said.

"The effort and contacts between Israel, the United States and the Palestinian Authority during the last 24 hours succeeded to stop the escalation," Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP.

The head of an umbrella committee representing all Palestinian armed factions, Ibrahim Abu al-Naja, said earlier that militant groups were working towards an agreement to end rocket attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip.

However, there was no immediate confirmation from radical groups that such an agreement was in place.

Nine Palestinians have been killed in air strikes over the Gaza Strip since a suicide bombing in northern Israel on Wednesday killed five Israelis.

"What we want now is to keep the

cooldown, commit (the Palestinians) to the national position and stop the armed showdown to create good circumstances to solve the outstanding issues between the two sides," Abu Rudeina added.

Meetings have taken place between faction representatives and the Palestinian Authority, and Abbas had been in contact with Arab leaders to reach a comprehensive agreement to stop the escalation, Abu al-Naja said.

He had called for a guarantee from the international community and Israel not to break the calm, but a senior Israeli official told AFP that the Jewish state was not part of the agreement announced by the Palestinian Authority.

The matter was a purely internal affair, the source said on condition of anonymity.

No rocket attacks have been reported in Israel since a projectile landed in the early hours of Saturday, causing no injuries or damage.

The Israeli army responded with

a burst of artillery fire into open fields in the northern Gaza Strip, used by militants to fire makeshift rockets.

Israel's pullout from Gaza last month had raised hopes in the international community of a genuine breakthrough in the peace process but such optimism has steadily fallen amid lingering violence.

The Palestinian Authority had called on the United States to press Israel for an immediate ceasefire and an end to air raids on the Gaza Strip.

"We have asked the United States to make contact with Israel to obtain an immediate ceasefire and an end to Israeli air raids on the Gaza Strip," Abu Rudeina told AFP on Saturday.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had previously ruled out talks with Abbas unless the Palestinian Authority cracks down on militants.

Militant factions have been largely observing a shaky ceasefire in attacks on Israel since Abbas was elected in January.

Rebels step up attacks

Truck bomb kills 30 in Iraq in Iraq

AP, AFP, Baghdad

Insurgents killed two men in an oil tanker truck, two construction workers and a government employee yesterday, one day after a car bombing in a Shia farming village left more than two dozens Iraqis dead.

The surge in violence came as political blocs unveiled their lists of candidates for Dec. 15 parliamentary elections, which the United States and its coalition partners hope will help restore enough stability to allow them to begin bringing their forces home next year.

In Sunday's worst attack, a roadside bomb destroyed one of several oil tanker trucks driving on a main road in south Baghdad, sending a fire ball up over the area and killing the two men inside, said police Capt. Ibrahim Abdul-Ridha. Four civilians in the area at the time were wounded.

Three separate drive-by shootings in the capital killed two construction workers and wounded three; seriously injured a shopkeeper in the Dora district; and hit a car carrying Cabinet adviser Ghalib Abdul Mahdi to work, wounding him and killing his driver, police said.

In Samarra, 100km north of Baghdad, a roadside bomb killed a farmer on his tractor and seriously injured two other civilians, said police Capt. Laith Mohammed.

A bomb hidden in a truck loaded with dates exploded Saturday evening in the centre of a Shia farming village northeast of Baghdad, killing 30 people and injuring at least 34.

Three American soldiers died in separate bombings in Baghdad and northern Iraq.

In the west of the country, US Marines said they killed 10 extremists Saturday in villages near the Syrian

border, where Air Force jets blasted a suspected militant safe house the day before. US officials said an al-Qaeda official from Saudi Arabia may have been killed in the airstrike.

On Saturday night, the corpses of three handcuffed and blindfolded Iraqis were found in Baghdad, and police said an Iraqi soldier and the brother of a policeman were gunned down.

A new Pentagon report estimated that 26,000 Iraqis have been killed or wounded by insurgents since Jan. 1, 2004. In the most recent period, from Aug. 29 to Sept. 16, there were an estimated 64 Iraqi casualties each day.

A recent Associated Press count found that at least 3,870 Iraqis have died in the last six months. The AP count found that two-thirds of those killed were civilians and one-third were security personnel.

UN to vote on tough Syria resolution

AFP, UNITED NATIONS/ Damascus

The UN Security Council holds a ministerial meeting today to vote on a tough resolution threatening Syria with economic sanctions if it does not fully cooperate with the probe into the murder of Lebanon's ex-premier.

The text, co-sponsored by the United States, France and Britain, has been revised several times to take into account the concerns of some members, including veto-wielding Russia and China, opposed to any mention of such sanctions.

But the United States and France, which drafted the text, said they were optimistic that a large majority of the council would endorse it.

US and French diplomats said 13 foreign ministers were expected to attend Monday's session, which follows the release of a report by UN

chief investigator Detlev Mehlis implicating senior Syrian security officials in the murder of Lebanese former premier Rafiq Hariri in Beirut last February.

"What we see is unanimous support for a very strong, very clear signal to Syria," the US ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, said. "I don't foresee a veto."

To be adopted, a resolution needs the support of at least nine of the council's 15 members and no veto from the five permanent members: Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

France's UN envoy Jean-Marc de la Sabliere said the co-sponsors had gone out of their way to accommodate the concerns expressed by dissenters.

"We hope that it will be approved by all," he added.



PHOTO: AFP

A family walk toward a shelter in Puerto Cabezas Saturday in the Autonomus North Atlantic Region (RAAN), some 445km northwest of Managua as the city braces for a direct hit from strengthening Hurricane Beta.

Hurricane lashes Nicaragua coast

REUTERS, PUERTO Cabezas

Hurricane Beta gained power early on Sunday as it battered Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, where troops tried to rush thousands of people into shelters to escape its fierce winds and rains.

Beta strengthened to almost a Category 3 hurricane with winds of 110 mph (175 kph), and forecasters warned it could be even stronger by the time its eye hits the jungle coast in the next few hours.

With the storm already lashing the normally sleepy fishing town of Puerto Cabezas, officials raced to find solid shelters for its residents and Miskito Indian evacuees from small fishing villages along the coast.

"It is impossible to think you could

evacuate 50,000 people between now and 6 in the morning. We don't have the means to do it," President Enrique Bolanos said in a late night television and radio address. "We are doing everything humanly possible."

Defence Minister Avil Ramirez said the army has food and medicines in place but that it was impossible to evacuate this remote town and he warned many homes might not survive.

"Puerto Cabezas has simple wooden homes and, faced with these wind speeds, unfortunately no one can be prepared."

Plastic sheets were nailed over windows at one concrete shelter where 53 patients from the town's only hospital had been moved for their safety.

Prosecutor, admn at odds over Libby

AP, Washington

The prosecution's conclusion: Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff zealously pursued information about a critic who said the Bush administration manipulated intelligence to make the case for war.

The view of the president and vice president: I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby is a dedicated public servant who has worked tirelessly on behalf of his country.

Is Libby an influential White

House adviser who lied? Or is he a man with a hectic schedule who happens to remember events differently from the reporters and administration figures who will eventually be called to testify against him?

"As lawyers, we recognize that a person's recollection and memory of events will not always match those of other people, particularly when they are asked to testify months after the events occurred," Libby's lawyer, Joseph Tate, said in a statement.