



PHOTO: AFP
Volunteers help evacuate trapped residents from their flooded house in Jakarta yesterday. Indonesian rescuers, police and troops in inflatable boats helped evacuate Jakarta residents stranded in severe floods that have killed 29 as the number left homeless approached 350,000.

Indonesian rescuers battle to reach flood victims

Australia, US give aid for flood victims

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian rescuers, police and troops in inflatable boats yesterday helped evacuate Jakarta residents stranded in severe floods that have killed 29, as the number left homeless approached 350,000.

Tens of thousands of houses have been inundated after rivers and canals which criss-cross Jakarta burst their banks following days of torrential downpours in the city and the adjoining towns of Tangerang and Bekasi.

Health ministry officials put the number of displaced at nearly 340,000. The floods are the worst to hit Jakarta since 2002, when 40 people were killed, and meteorologists have predicted the heavy rain will continue.

"The focus today (Monday) remains the evacuation of people from flooded areas in Jakarta, Tangerang and Bekasi," said Mursid, an officer in charge at the National Disaster Mitigation Coordinating Centre.

Many residents have escaped their flooded homes on makeshift rafts or by wading through the waist-high muddy and polluted waters rather than wait for help to arrive.

Others remained trapped on the roofs of their houses or were refusing to leave, preferring to stay with their relatives or to guard their

belongings despite the lack of drinking water and electricity.

Clean water supplies have been cut to about 500,000 people due to the floods which have put treatment plants out of action, the Kompas daily said, quoting the city's two water companies.

Jakarta governor Sutiyoso appealed to residents to leave their flooded homes for their own safety and to ease the distribution of relief supplies.

"Do not hesitate to leave areas which we deem as being on top alert and which urgently have to be evacuated," he told ElShinta radio.

"If you refuse to be evacuated, it will only endanger yourself and it is also very difficult to push relief door-to-door."

Police reported 29 dead while health ministry officials said they had no report of the new victims to change their figures of 18 killed and two missing.

Television stations showed footage of inundated areas around the capital, mainly along the Ciliwung, Pesangrahan and Krukut rivers, with people being evacuated from their roofs or the second floors of their homes.

Members of the Indonesian Red Cross and other volunteers were delivering food to thousands of people camped out on roadsides or in public buildings and mosques

turned into temporary shelters.

The Indonesian Red Cross said it was supplying water to some 30,000 people in one North Jakarta ward alone. Australia and the United States said they had provided a total of more than 200,000 dollars for emergency food and other supplies for flood victims.

Wealthier residents of the capital headed for the luxury hotels, with queues seen at the check-in desk of the Hotel Borobudur on Sunday, while poorer people sought refuge wherever they could, even in graveyards.

Meanwhile, Australia and the United States on Monday provided emergency relief for victims of floods that have displaced some 340,000 people in the Indonesian capital.

Australia's contribution of 150,000 Australian dollars (117,000 US) would provide thousands of emergency food parcels and hygiene kits to be distributed by the Indonesian Red Cross, ambassador Bill Farmer said in a statement.

"We are in close contact with the Indonesian government and other humanitarian agencies and stand ready to provide further assistance as required," Farmer said.

UN warns Nepali cops to stop using deadly force

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal police must stop using deadly force to control ethnic protests in the southeast, the United Nations, which is aiding a fragile peace process in the country, said yesterday.

"While recognising that security forces have a difficult task in ensuring law and order, the imposition of a curfew does not justify the use of live bullets in non-life-threatening situations", said Lena Sundh, the Nepal representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

At least 19 people have been killed since protests began in late January in the Terai, the plains region bordering India.

Four protesters died Sunday after police opened fire on rioting crowds, said Birendra Shrestha, a police officer from Malangawa, about 250km southeast of Kathmandu.

Nepal's Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala was holding talks with political leaders and former rebel Maoists Monday morning in Kathmandu to try and tackle the unrest, a government spokesman said.

At the weekend the Mahadhesi Janadhikar (People's Rights) Forum, a group that says it represents the ethnic community on the plains, demanded that the region be turned into an autonomous state to end the unrest.

The Mahadhesi community, which dominates the area and accounts for a third of Nepal's 27 million people, has long complained of discrimination and being shut out of power.

As part of a peace deal between Nepal's former rebel Maoists and the government signed late last year, the UN has begun registering and monitoring Maoist weapons and soldiers.

The main violence-hit districts in the southeast were under daytime curfew and quiet Monday morning, police said.

But petrol tankers coming from India, Nepal's sole supplier, were backed up at the border as drivers declined to travel through the restive plains to reach the capital.

As a result, petrol supplies had dwindled in Kathmandu and the government ordered rationing by state-owned Nepal Oil Corp from Monday.

Hamas PM urges unity deal with Abbas

Truce takes hold

REUTERS, Gaza

Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas said yesterday he hoped a meeting with President Mahmoud Abbas would result in an agreement on a unity government to end a crippling Western embargo.

Haniyeh and Hamas chief Khaled Meshaal will hold talks in Makkah today with a Fatah delegation led by Abbas, which also aim to end factional warfare which has killed more than 80 Palestinians since December.

"There may be obstacles but we confirm that we are going with true intentions to reach a Palestinian-Palestinian agreement that would end tensions and reinforce national unity," Haniyeh said at the weekly cabinet meeting in Gaza.

"We have no choice but to reach an agreement," he said.

Haniyeh said a ceasefire deal between rival Hamas and Fatah forces was taking hold and he hoped it would last. "The government is

determined that calm should be a permanent one and not temporary," he said.

In Gaza City gunmen from rival factions stood down, with minor violations reported.

Members of the governing Hamas faction and rival Fatah conducted joint patrols of the Gaza Strip to ensure that their gunmen had left the bullet-pocked streets and removed checkpoints as required by the ceasefire's midnight deadline.

Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum accused Fatah of violating the ceasefire by abducting four Hamas members and refusing to pull gunmen off several rooftops in Gaza City.

"Such violations could blow up the internal situation and endanger the Mecca dialogue," he told Reuters.

While both sides had released some hostages taken during the fighting, officials said that Hamas still held nine Fatah men while 32 members of Hamas remained in Fatah custody.

Kashmiri rebels urged to declare truce

Musharraf optimistic about solution to Kashmir row

REUTERS, Srinagar/ Islamabad

Kashmir's main separatist alliance on Sunday urged militants fighting Indian rule in the Himalayan region to declare a temporary ceasefire to help resolve a decades-old dispute, which has killed tens of thousands.

"Kashmir is a complex issue which needs to be resolved in a phased manner," said Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, chairman of the moderate All Parties Hurriyat (Freedom) Conference after a trip to Pakistan where he met political leaders and Kashmiri militants.

"We feel the Kashmiri (militant) groups should declare a time-bound ceasefire, then India would be asked to do its part of the bargain within that specific period ... say two months, six months," he told a news conference.

On the other hand Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf expressed optimism yesterday about the decades-old dispute with India over the Kashmir region saying the two countries were focusing on reconciliation not confrontation.

"We are seeing some light at the end of the tunnel where we may be able to resolve the dispute for good, and for the benefit of the people of Kashmir and to give them final peace," Musharraf told reporters.

Monday is Kashmir Solidarity Day in Pakistan, a holiday introduced in the 1990s as a show of sympathy for the Muslim insurgents who have been battling security forces in Indian Kashmir with Pakistani support since 1989.

Marches and rallies were held across the country.

A separatist revolt in the scenic region has killed more than 40,000 people since it began in 1989, officials say. Human rights groups put the toll at about 60,000 dead or missing.

Authorities say violence has steadily decreased in Kashmir since India and Pakistan, who claim the region in full and rule in parts, began a peace process in 2004. But people are still killed in daily shootouts and occasional grenade attacks.

During his trip, Farooq said he met Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and urged him to find a

political solution to the Kashmir dispute.

Farooq, who is also the chief priest of Kashmir, has had his residence and office attacked by suspected militants several times since the alliance agreed to peace talks with New Delhi in 2004. The talks have so far made little progress.

The Hurriyat leader, whose father and uncle were killed by suspected militants, has been pressing New Delhi for demilitarisation and a complete end to alleged human rights violations by Indian troops in the region.

"A big way could be made with withdrawal of troops. We need to counter India's argument that it cannot withdraw its troops as long as violence continues in Kashmir," he said.

Earlier on Sunday, a suspected separatist militant was killed when a grenade he was planning to throw at a security patrol exploded in his hand in a crowded street in Indian Kashmir, police said.

Eight other people were wounded in the blast in Anantnag, 55 km south of Srinagar.



PHOTO: AFP
Veiled female supporters of the Pakistan's hardline Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) show the victory sign as they march during a protest rally against Indian rule in the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir in Islamabad yesterday. President Pervez Musharraf hailed a new and more conciliatory tone in talks with India over disputed Kashmir, as Pakistanis rallied for the "Kashmir Solidarity Day".

'N Korea willing on nuclear freeze'

US envoy seeks 'good start' from talks

AFP, Seoul/ Tokyo

North Korea is willing in principle to freeze its Yongbyon nuclear reactor and allow UN inspections if it receives energy aid and other benefits, a pro-Pyongyang newspaper said yesterday.

"The DPRK delivered its position to the six countries, including the US, that it will stop operating the Yongbyon nuclear facilities and allow IAEA's nuclear inspections in accordance with the maturity of the situation," said the website of the Chosun Sinbo, published for ethnic North Koreans in Japan.

The communist nation will resume nuclear negotiations with the United States, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia in Beijing on Thursday.

It expelled International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors in late 2002 after the latest nuclear dispute erupted.

"The DPRK (North Korea) will

never compromise the principle that it should take steps toward denuclearisation only in line with the creation of DPRK-US mutual trust," the paper said.

"The DPRK has consistently insisted that alternative energy should be provided until the completion of light-water nuclear reactors, if it ever begins to dismantle the existing nuclear programme."

Meanwhile, US negotiator Christopher Hill said Monday that North Korea had to make a "good start" in giving up its nuclear weapons if it wanted to reap the economic benefits.

Hill, visiting Tokyo ahead of six-nation disarmament talks starting Thursday in Beijing, did not rule out a weekend Japanese press report saying that Pyongyang was demanding oil shipments to suspend a key reactor.

'Military action against Iran highly dangerous'

AFP, London

Military action against Iran with the goal of shutting down its nuclear programme would be "highly dangerous" and "counter-productive", according to an independent British report published yesterday.

The report, which concludes that diplomatic solutions to the issue must be "resolutely" pursued, says that while Britain and Prime Minister Tony Blair can play a major role in resolving the impasse by putting pressure on the United States, "only through direct US-Iranian engagement can an agreement be found".

Among the report's authors are the development charity Oxfam, the Blairite think-tank the Foreign Policy Centre, along with Unison, Amicus and the GMB -- three of Britain's biggest trade unions.

India faces delicate diplomacy in US, Iran talks

AFP, New Delhi

India will engage in delicate diplomacy this week during talks with Washington on a crucial civilian nuclear deal and with nuclear renegade Iran over energy and regional issues, analysts said.

"India will have to maintain a very fine balance," said CU Bhaskar, an analyst with the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, to avoid raising the ire of, and damaging its economic ties with, both nations.

Energy cooperation will be high on Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee's agenda when he visits Tehran, his first official trip outside South Asia since taking office in May.

His talks on Tuesday and Wednesday come amid growing US pressure on countries for tougher sanctions against the Islamic regime for defying demands to rein in its nuclear programme.

India and Iran are expected to discuss two multi-billion dollar gas deals including a pipeline that would cross Pakistan to help meet demand in energy-hungry India.

Mukherjee is also almost "certain to discuss the situation in the region," an Indian official said, as tension mounts over Tehran's nuclear ambitions and the US military build-up in the Gulf and Iraq.

In Washington, India's special envoy on the US nuclear deal, Shyam Saran, is expected to conclude a deal that lifts three decades of US sanctions barring the transfer of civilian nuclear technology and equipment to India.

The US Congress in December gave the go-ahead to Washington to begin the negotiations with New Delhi, seen as the high watermark of the rapidly warming ties between the two nations.



PHOTO: AFP
Pakistani counterpart Pervez Musharraf (R) speaks with Iranian Intelligence Minister Gholam Hossein Mohseni Ejeie (L) as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (C) looks on in Tehran yesterday. Musharraf arrived in Tehran for a day of talks with Iranian leaders focused on his plan to find an Islamic solution to halt violence in the Middle East and discuss other challenges confronting the Muslim world.

Climate change to hit poor worst, says Ban

REUTERS, Nairobi

The world's poor, who are the least responsible for global warming, will suffer the most from the effects of climate change, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told global environment ministers yesterday.

"The degradation of the global environment continues unabated ... and the effects of climate change are being felt across the globe," Ban said in a statement after last week's toughest warning yet mankind is to blame for global warming.

In comments read on his behalf at the start of a week-long Nairobi gathering, Ban said all countries would feel the adverse effect of climate change.

"But it is the poor, in Africa and small island states, who will suffer the most, even though they are the least responsible for global warming."

Experts say Africa is the lowest emitter of the greenhouse gases that cause warming, but due to its

poverty, under-development and geography, has the most to lose under predictions of wrenching change in weather patterns.

Desertification round the Sahara and the shrinking of Mount Kilimanjaro's snow-cap have become potent symbols in Africa of the global environment crisis.

UN environment agencies have been lobbying Ban to play a leading role in the hunt for a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on cutting greenhouse gases, which expires in 2012.

Ringling in the ears of delegates at Monday's start of talks attended by nearly 100 nations was last week's warning by a UN panel that there was a more than 90 percent chance humans were behind most of the warming in the past 50 years.

Governments are under pressure to act on the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which forecast more droughts, heatwaves and rising seas.