



A vehicle passes through the waterlogged streets of Mumbai yesterday. Several roads, subways and railway tracks in various parts of the city were inundated with overnight monsoon showers, which brought commuter trains in some areas to a standstill.

Rain causes mayhem in Karnataka, Maharashtra
Death toll rises to 117

PTI, Hyderabad

Torrential rains lashed Karnataka and Maharashtra yesterday, throwing rail and air traffic out of gear but the situation improved in worst-hit Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, even as the death toll in these states mounted to 117.

Several coastal and low-lying villages in Andhra Pradesh were cut off from the rest of the state, leaving many persons marooned. Seventy army personnel joined civil authorities in rescuing people from badly-affected Kurnool district where 85,000 people have been evacuated and kept in 51 relief camps.

Hundreds of families in Kerala continued to be in relief camps with many coastal areas still remaining vulnerable to swirling floods.

The death toll in the heavy rains in Andhra Pradesh has been put at 37 after 13 persons, who were presumed dead after being washed away in Kundu river near Kurnool, were found alive on Saturday.

Chief Minister YS Rajasekhar Reddy undertook an aerial survey of the worst-affected Kurnool district in Rayalaseema region where several villages remained cut-off.

The relief operations were in full swing as the situation showed improvement in Prakasam, Krishna, Guntur, East Godavari

districts in the coastal belt, officials said.

Kurnool district bore the brunt of flash floods accounting for 9 deaths followed by Guntur (5), Prakasam (4), three each in Kadpa, Karimnagar, Mahabubnagar and Hyderabad. The remaining deaths were reported from Srikakulam and East Godavari.

Intermittent rains continued in Kurnool and Mahboobnagar districts but flood waters receded in many areas after a lull in downpour.

Heavy rains also lashed Mumbai and its suburbs for the second day on Sunday, leading to water-logging in various low-lying areas and disrupting traffic.

Road, rail and air services were affected due to the first heavy rainfall of this season.

Three persons were injured in Chembur area after a wall collapsed following heavy rains.

Warnings have been issued to fishermen not to venture into the sea along the Maharashtra and Goa coast. Ports have also been told to remain alert and take necessary precaution. So far eleven people have been killed in rain-related incidents in the state.

The rain fury in Karnataka continued with six more persons dying, to take the toll in rain-related incidents in the state to 39.

Thousands greet sacked Pak judge

AFP, Sahiwal

With drums, petals and decorated horses, thousands of people gave Pakistan's suspended chief justice a festive welcome Sunday on his latest tour mustering support for his reinstatement.

Ifthikhar Muhammad Chaudhry arrived before dawn in this highway town where many people had stayed up all night waiting to hear him speak.

He had left Lahore early Saturday on a 230-kilometre (140-mile) journey to the central city of Multan to address a lawyers' convention.

En route, thousands of people have showered him with fresh rose petals and chanted slogans against President Pervez Musharraf, who suspended him March 9 over allegations of misconduct.

"Go Musharraf, go" they chanted to drum beats, as villagers led decorated horses and camels in a traditional welcome. Some threw currency notes.

"Supremacy of law and judiciary is inevitable for the country," Chaudhry told the crowd of around 5,000.

Norway meet seeks to end Lanka bloodshed
Colombo claims killing of 13 more rebels

AFP, Colombo

Peace broker Norway is holding a crucial meeting with Sri Lanka's top aid donors this week in a bid to halt a new wave of bloodshed, but analysts Sunday said they see little prospect of a breakthrough.

The formal meeting on Tuesday would follow a preparatory gathering of officials on Monday in Norway's capital, Oslo, and explore ways of bringing the government and Tamil Tiger rebels back to peace negotiations, a Norwegian statement said.

Oslo-brokered peace talks collapsed in October last year and since then diplomatic efforts have failed to end violence in the bitter ethnic conflict which has claimed more than 60,000 lives in the past 35 years.

More than 5,000 people have died in the latest wave of fighting since December 2005 despite a truce in place since February 2002.

"The purpose of the meeting is to share information and views," Norway's International Development Minister Erik Solheim said in the statement.

Four "co-chairs" -- Japan, the US, the European Union and Norway -- would analyse the deteriorating situation since their last meeting in November, he said.

Richard Boucher, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, and Japan's special envoy Yasushi Akashi would attend the meeting, the statement said, while Andreas Michaelis would represent the EU presidency and James Moran the European Commission.

Norwegian diplomats played down expectations of a breakthrough, saying they may not even issue a statement at the end of the talks.

Sri Lankan retired top diplomat Nanda Godage said Norway's tone was expected. "They don't have

US House votes to deny all aid to Saudi Arabia

AFP, Washington

The US House of Representatives has voted to deny all aid to Saudi Arabia, despite repeated assurances by the administration the desert kingdom was cooperating with the United States in the war on terror.

The ban is contained in a little-publicised amendment quietly slipped by a bipartisan group of lawmakers into a 34.2-billion-dollar bill financing US foreign operations in fiscal 2008.

The massive bill, featuring a wide range of humanitarian programmes, was approved by lawmakers in the middle of the night on Friday.

Similar measures on aid to Saudi Arabia have been passed by the House before. But the current one goes a step further by closing a legislative loophole that in the past had allowed the administration of President George W. Bush to waive these bans by invoking requirements of the war on terror.

While oil-rich Saudi Arabia has never been a large recipient of US aid, the Bush administration channelled a total of more than 2.5 million dollars to the kingdom in fiscal 2005 and 2006.

Atlantis crew reunites with families

AP, Houston

Atlantis' seven astronauts reunited with their families in Texas on Saturday, a day after the space shuttle capped a two-week mission with a perfect landing in the Mohave Desert.

Sunita "Suni" Williams was especially happy to return to Earth after spending more than six months at the international space station.

"This gravity thing takes a bit getting used to," she said moments after landing with the rest of the crew on a Nasa Gulfstream jet around 2:45 pm at Ellington Field.

Williams set an endurance record for the longest single spaceflight by a woman at 195 days, as well as the record for most time spacewalking by a woman.

"It's just the time and the place," said Williams, noting she hopes her mission paves the way for more women to travel to space, during a 20-minute ceremony in an open hanger.

The crew was assembled on a stage with a giant American flag as the backdrop. Along with Williams were shuttle commander Rick Sturckow, pilot Lee Archambault and mission specialists Patrick Forrester, James Reilly, Steven Swanson and Danny Olivas. Each offered his thanks to family, ground crew and others in brief remarks.

Embattled Nato admits more civilian deaths in anti-Taliban fight

AFP, Kabul

The Nato-led force in Afghanistan admitted yesterday to killing more civilians, this time in Pakistan, a day after harsh criticism from President Hamid Karzai about military operations.

A weapon fired by the International Security Assistance Force (Isaf) hit a building in Pakistan as warplanes were chasing down insurgents preparing to attack a base across the Afghan border Saturday, a spokesman said.

Residents said a child, a woman and seven men were killed. Pakistan military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad said his government had protested and demanded an explanation. He said a rocket had struck the building.

"We have reports that one of our weapons hit a building which may have had a number of civilians in it and that building may have been a home or way-station or some hotel facility," Isaf spokesman Major John Thomas told AFP.

"We regret the loss of innocent life," he said.

Isaf said earlier up to 60 militants were killed in the operation, which spanned the border in Afghanistan's southeastern Paktika province and Pakistan's North Waziristan tribal area.

In Kabul Saturday, Karzai accused Isaf and the separate US-led coalition of causing civilian casualties in the battle against insurgents through "indiscriminate and unprecise" operations.

There was an "extreme use of force" and action was not being coordinated with Afghan forces despite repeated complaints over several years, the president said.

A Nato spokesman said the president's anger was understandable.

"But let's make clear that no Isaf soldier intends to kill civilians," Nicholas Lunt said in Kabul. "That's not the case with Taliban. They deliberately kill civilians."



A Pakistani photojournalist takes photographs of the wreckage of huge steel billboards on a street a day after a torrential thunderstorm in Karachi yesterday. At least 228 people were killed and scores injured by torrential rains that uprooted trees and huge steel billboards in southern Pakistan.

Pak uncertainty puts peace process on hold

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Political uncertainty in Pakistan sparked by mass protests against President Pervez Musharraf and threats by exiled leaders that New Delhi should not rush to sign agreements with the military-backed regime may have forced India to put the peace diplomacy with its neighbour on hold.

Although New Delhi will not like the power tussle and uncertainty in Pakistan to jeopardise its three-year-old peace process with Islamabad, there is a growing feeling in South Block that Musharraf is losing control and that it makes sense to wait and watch before thinking of any major initiative, reliable sources privy to the government thinking told IANS.

"A person who is so engrossed in internal affairs can't have much time for serious political dialogue with India. India should be wary of any high-level political dialogue with Pakistan," G Parthasarathy, former Indian ambassador to Pakistan, told IANS.

Agrees Kuldip Nayar, veteran

journalist and keen Pakistan-watcher: "The peace process has been put on the backburner. Musharraf's position has weakened after civil society, including lawyers and media, turned against him following the sacking of the chief justice and subsequent mishandling by imposing curbs on the media."

Nayar advises New Delhi to be cautious in its dealings with Musharraf.

"It is the beginning of the end of Musharraf. Things may have to start all over again if there is a change of regime," he said.

India has lately become circumspect about any serious dialogue with the Musharraf regime in Pakistan, especially after recent pronouncements by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif that he will not honour any treaty Musharraf signs with New Delhi.

In a recent interview with NDTV, Sharif, currently in exile in London and who is planning to contest the coming elections which Musharraf has promised will be held by November, said he "doesn't recognise Musharraf as the president of Pakistan or a legitimate president of

Pakistan" and therefore he will not recognise any treaty or document he signs with India.

He also questioned Musharraf's style of carrying on the peace process with India by tossing "off-the-cuff" remarks about Kashmir through the media without evolving a broad-based consensus on key issues with India.

Sharif's reference was to Musharraf's four-point proposal revolving around joint management of Kashmir, self-governance, demilitarisation and making the Line of Control relevant.

"So I will not recognise anything that he signs with India," he said in a clear message to New Delhi not to put all its eggs in the Musharraf basket but to wait for a democratic regime to return in Pakistan.

While the prospects of Sharif or likely fellow-traveller Benazir Bhutto coming to power are not so bright, given the present state of disunity and disarray among the opposition parties, India has done its own calculations and has maintained that it will deal with whoever is in power.

Thousands clash with police in China housing dispute

AFP, Beijing

Thousands of protesters clashed with police in eastern China last week after security teams moved in to forcefully relocate families involved in a housing dispute, a rights group said yesterday.

Residents refusing to move out of their homes threw gas bombs at the security forces, igniting riots Wednesday in Shengzhou city, Zhejiang province, the Hong Kong-based Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy said.

Up to 20,000 protesters and onlookers were at the scene of the riots that left at least five police cars smashed up, it said.

Clashes kill 10 in Lebanon

AP, Tripoli

Lebanese troops clashed with suspected al-Qaeda-inspired militants in the northern port city of Tripoli early Sunday. Ten people died in the fighting, including a soldier and six gunmen, security officials said.

The clashes Saturday night and early Sunday in the Tripoli neighbourhood of Abu Samra marked a new escalation in the army's battle with Islamic militants, as the fighting shifted from the bomb-ravaged, besieged Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el-Bared on Tripoli's outskirts back to this city where violence first erupted May 20.

An army soldier, a policeman and two family members were killed in the confrontation, which began with

troops laying siege to a building where the gunmen had taken refuge after nighttime clashes in the area, the security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Six of the gunmen were also killed, the officials said, adding that troops stormed the building and were nearing the end of the operation.

The slain policeman happened to live in the besieged building. He confronted the gunmen, who killed him, his daughter and his uncle after failing to take the family hostage. At least 10 other people were wounded, including the policeman's wife and two relatives who were soldiers, the security officials said.



Politburo member of Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) Sitaram Yechury (2L) chats with West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee (L) at the meeting of the central committee of the CPI-M in New Delhi yesterday. The central committee is expected to endorse the suspension of Kerala chief minister VS Achuthanandan and the senior leader P Vijayan from the Politburo during their three-day meeting.