

China to spend \$13billion on quake relief, rebuilding

AFP, Beijing

China announced yesterday it would spend more than 13 billion dollars on relief and reconstruction work following last week's earthquake disaster, slashing its budget by five percent to free up cash.

In a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the government ordered 25 billion yuan (3.6 billion dollars) for relief operations and 70 billion yuan for reconstruction, the government said.

"We have the determination, the confidence and the capability to overcome all difficulties and obstacles," Wen was quoted as saying in a statement on the government's website.

"(We) will resolutely strike at the two tasks of winning the earthquake rescue and relief battle, and advancing the fast-paced development of society and the economy," he said.

The central government budget would be slashed by five percent this year to save funds for the quake

recovery, he said, adding that further reconstruction funding would be allocated in coming years if needed.

Wen unveiled a long list of difficulties facing his government, including feeding and housing the 5.2 million homeless, evacuating the

injured from remote mountainous areas, and consoling and comforting the many orphans and parents who had lost their children.

"Backward sanitary conditions have made it easy for the spread of epidemics, and the damaged and unsafe reservoirs and hydroelectric projects and rivers blocked by landslides are among the many hidden dangers that can lead to more disaster," Wen said.

"Resuming production in the disaster area and reconstruction in the aftermath of the disaster will be a very daunting task."

Disaster relief funds would be allocated for feeding, providing clean water, clothing and sheltering the homeless, as well as for repairing infrastructure such as roads, reservoirs and dams, he said.

The reconstruction fund would be aimed at returning economic production to the region and restoring local government and social administration to normal operations, he said.



A man grieves while searching for loved ones amid the rubble in the deserted and quake-ravaged town of Beichuan, which was closed off for fear of aftershocks and landslides yesterday in southwest China's quake-stricken Sichuan province.

Kennedy has brain tumour, says doctors

AFP, BOSTON, Massachusetts

Legendary political patriarch Senator Edward Kennedy has a malignant brain tumour, doctors said Tuesday, days after he was airlifted to a Boston hospital following a seizure.

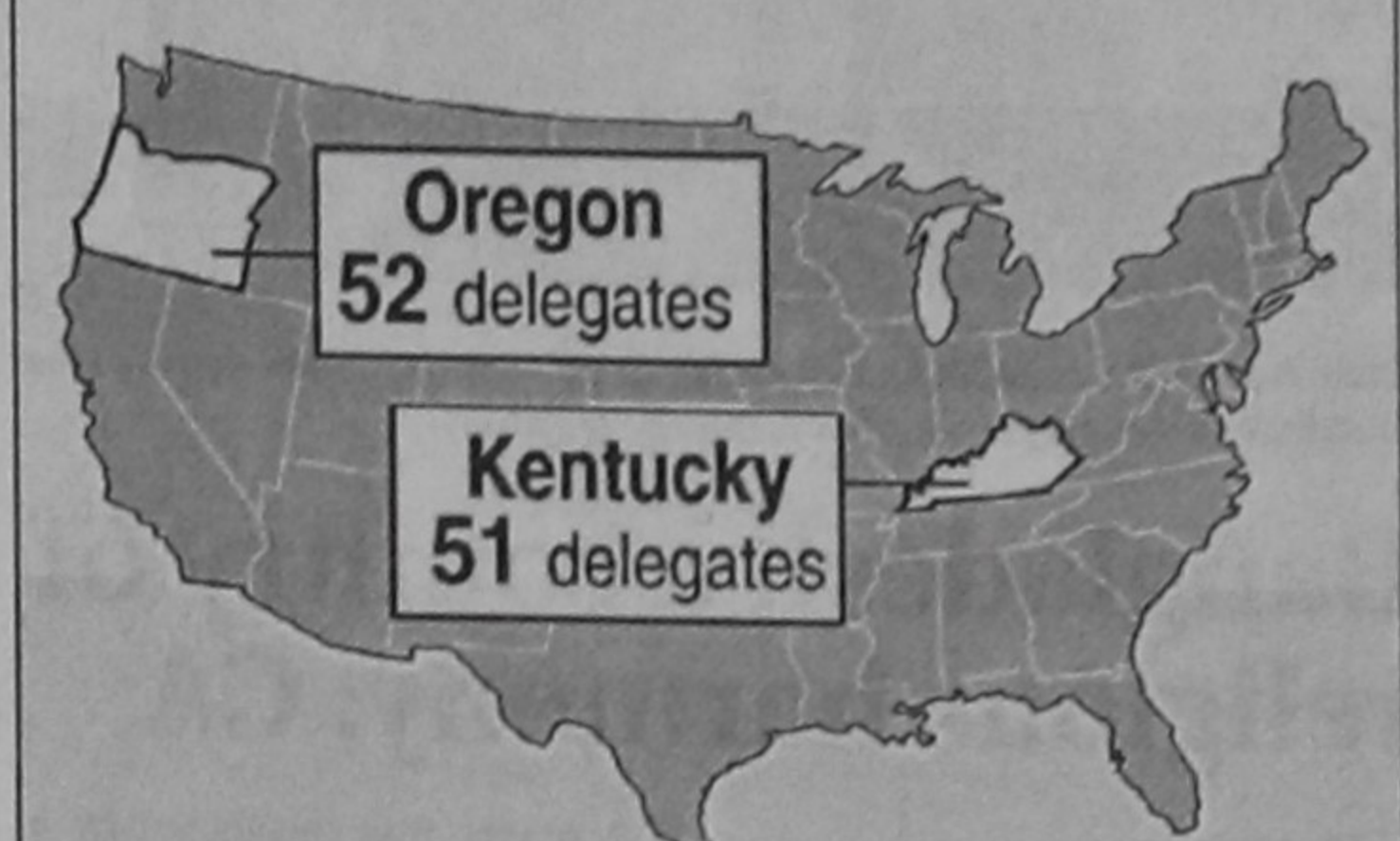
The liberal lion's cancer diagnosis sent shockwaves through the US political scene, which the 76-year-old has endured for nearly a half century, and cast a pall over the day's business over the US Congress.

"Preliminary results from a biopsy of the brain identified the cause of the seizure as a malignant glioma in the left parietal lobe," physicians Lee Schwamm and Larry Ronan said in a statement.

Normal treatment for such a condition is radiation and chemotherapy, the doctors said, adding that Kennedy, sole surviving brother of assassinated president John F Kennedy, was in "good spirits and full of energy."

Schwamm, vice chairman of Massachusetts General Hospital's neurology department and Ronan, a primary care physician, said further analysis and tests were needed to determine the best course of treatment for Kennedy.

US Democratic duel Tuesday's primaries



Source: RealClearPolitics delegates won so far 200508 AFP

White House nod within reach: Obama

AFP, Washington

Barack Obama's camp yesterday celebrated a potent milestone on the road to the Democratic presidential nomination after sharing the spoils with Hillary Clinton in the two latest contests.

Thumped Tuesday by Hillary in the socially conservative state of Kentucky, Obama won liberal Oregon handsily to come within a mere 69 delegates of the 2,026 needed to win the party nod.

The Illinois senator, 46, held a victory rally late Tuesday in Iowa, the midwestern battleground state where he scored a shock win in the very first nominating contest in January.

"We have returned to Iowa with a majority of delegates elected by the American people," he told some 7,000 jubilant supporters who roared back, "Obama '08."

"You have put us within reach of the Democratic nomination for president of the United States of America."

Obama, seeking to become the first black US president, sewed up a majority of "pledged" delegates elected in more than five months of coast-to-coast nominating contests.

That majority leaves Hillary's fate entirely in the hands of Democratic "superdelegates," nearly 800 party grandees who pundits believe are unlikely to overturn the popular will of the regular delegates.

But Tuesday's results, especially in Kentucky, hinted at a continuing racial divide among Democratic voters and the Obama campaign was loath to alienate Hillary and her hard-bitten supporters.

Israel accepts Gaza truce in principle

AFP, Cairo

Egyptian state media announced on Tuesday that Israel has agreed in principle to a truce in and around Gaza and quoted calls by a top official for Palestinian militants to seize an "historic opportunity".

The announcement came after a day of renewed bloodshed in the territory controlled by the Islamist Hamas movement since last June with four people being killed in Israeli air raids, one of them a 13-year-old boy.

"Israeli leaders (have informed us) of their support for and understanding of the Egyptian proposals for a truce," Egypt's official MENA news agency quoted a senior official as saying without giving his name.

Israel says it is "ready to implement it as soon as Israeli leaders have been notified of the agreement of Palestinian organizations to parts of the truce proposals," the official added.

He called on Palestinian militant groups to respond positively to the Israeli move, saying they should not "pass up this historic opportunity."

In Jerusalem, the Israeli government spokesman neither confirmed nor denied the Egyptian report.

"As far as we are concerned, we can only indicate that contacts are continuing," said Mark Regav, spokesman for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman -- who has acted as go-between in the negotiations between Israel and the militants -- conveyed the Israeli offer to a delegation from the Islamist Hamas group which controls Gaza earlier in the day, the Egyptian news agency said.

A broader meeting of Palestinian factions is planned to "discuss the modalities of the next phase and the start of implementation with intensified efforts by Egypt to resolve the two issues of an exchange of prisoners... and the complete lifting of the blockade," it added.

Suleiman presented Egypt's initial proposals to Israeli leaders on May 12 after securing the endorsement of 12 Palestinian factions. But Israeli officials made their agreement conditional on progress in negotiations for the release of Corporal Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier held by Gaza militants for almost two years since his capture in a deadly cross-border raid.

Hamas has been insisting that Shalit's freedom is an entirely separate issue from the proposed truce and has been demanding the release of some 450 Palestinians from Israeli jails in exchange.

The Islamists have also been demanding the lifting of an Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip imposed after they seized power from forces loyal to moderate Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas almost a year ago.

Violence marks anti-Maoist strike in Kathmandu

PTI, Kathmandu

Sporadic violence broke out in Nepal's capital yesterday during a day-long shutdown to protest the killing of a city businessman allegedly by the Maoists, an incident that sparked resentment against the former rebels who are expected to head the country's new government.

Life came to a standstill in all three districts of Kathmandu valley with vehicles remaining off the roads, shops and factories closed and schools and colleges shut down. The strike call was given by the family of the victim, supported by various student and youth groups.

Clashes took place between protestors and police in different places, including Chabahil and Gongabun areas.

At least three protestors were injured during the violence that also saw angry youths smashing the window-panes of a dozen cars and other vehicles, while raising

anti-Maoist slogans and tearing down party flags and banners.

The killing of businessman Ramhari Shrestha, said to be a Maoist supporter, came as a major embarrassment to the party and its supreme Prachanda, who is planning to head the next government in Nepal after the Maoists emerged as the single largest in the April 10 Constituent Assembly polls.

Thirty-five-year-old Shrestha was allegedly abducted by the Maoists charging him with stealing Rs 1.7 million and a handgun last month. He was later killed inside a UN-monitored cantonment in southern Chitwan district.

The murder sparked anti-Maoist protests by Shrestha's family, student groups and human rights organisations.

Prachanda has agreed to forming a high-level probe commission to investigate the matter and take action against the guilty. Some "selfish elements" within the party has carried out the murder, he is reported to have said.

Israeli MPs slam Olmert's Syria peace bid

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli members of parliament yesterday dismissed Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's announcement of renewed peace talks with Syria as a bid to divert attention from the latest police inquiry against him.

"Olmert is trying to fool decent peace-seeking citizens," said MP Shelly Yehimovitz of the centre-left Labour party, a key coalition partner of Olmert's government.

"His goal is to divert public attention from the cash envelopes he might have received and from the investigation against him."

Israel and Syria announced on Wednesday that they had launched indirect negotiations through Turkish mediators, eight years after the last attempt at peacemaking broke down over the fate of the occupied Golan Heights.

The announcement came two days before Olmert was scheduled to be questioned by police for the second time in a month over suspicions that he had unlawfully received cash from a US businessman between 1990 and 2003.

The latest scandal, the fourth police investigation in which the premier is embroiled, further threatened the already narrow parliamentary majority of Olmert's coalition and fuelled calls for his resignation.

Advertisement for Dhaka City Corporation (ঢাকা সিটি করপোরেশন) listing various services and contact information.

Advertisement for BGMEA (Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association) for their Annual General Meeting on 22 May 2008.

Advertisement for CNG-run buses, mentioning the DTCB executive director and fare details.

Large advertisement for Independent University, Bangladesh, featuring a tender notice for central air-conditioning.