

# Agencies mobilise for Georgia relief

Foreigners fly home

AFP, Paris

Aid agencies mobilised yesterday to help an estimated 100,000 Georgians displaced by the fighting, as foreigners evacuated from the country flew into Paris with tales of the devastation.

A first flight from the UN's refugee agency landed in Tbilisi airport Tuesday carrying tents, jerry cans, blankets and kitchen equipment, UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond told reporters in Geneva.

A second was due to fly out from Copenhagen on Wednesday, he added.

Combined, that meant an extra 70 tonnes of supplies for up to 30,000 people, to supplement material already distributed from UNHCR warehouses in Georgia.

The International Committee of

the Red Cross said a plane with 15 tonnes of medical supplies and material to support water distribution was due to arrive in Tbilisi Tuesday.

ICRC spokeswoman Anna Nelson said they had also been asked to help about 1,500 people in the breakaway region of Abkhazia, western Georgia.

The UN World Food Programme in Tbilisi said they had distributed food to 2,000 displaced people, but said the numbers arriving in the Georgian capital were rising.

In all, nearly 100,000 people had been forced to flee their homes because of the conflict, according to the UNHCR.

The figures, supplied by Georgia and Russia, suggested that some 30,000 South Ossetians had moved into North Ossetia, where the

UNCHR said it was ready to help the Russian authorities. Another 12,000 displaced were inside South Ossetia itself.

A few thousand had moved south from South Ossetia into Georgia proper, while 56,000 people from the Gori region in Georgia -- 80 percent of the local population -- had also fled the fighting, most heading towards Tbilisi.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres meanwhile approved the release of two million dollars (1.3 million euros) in emergency aid.

On Monday, Washington made 250,000 dollars available to Georgia for emergency relief. The European Union announced 1.5 million dollars in aid to civilians on Sunday.

In Paris meanwhile some 170

French tourists and 91 other foreign nationals evacuated from Georgia touched down at Charles De Gaulle airport, speaking of a climate of "fear" in the capital Tbilisi.

"The atmosphere in Tbilisi is very heavy. People feel alone, they are afraid," said Alain Noel, 39, dark lines under his eyes, who was evacuated with his nine-month old baby.

"In Gori I saw people fleeing, I saw holes from the bombing," said 24-year-old law student Nicolas Papiashvili, a French citizen born in Georgia.

They were flown in on a French Airbus A340 that had left for Georgia Monday carrying humanitarian supplies. It was due to fly back to Georgia later Tuesday with a second shipment of aid and medicines.



A picture taken on Monday shows local residents fleeing as South Ossetian separatist troops engage Georgian soldiers in the South Ossetia town of Kurta.

## Resistance pays off, says Khamenei

AFP, Tehran

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said yesterday that resistance by nations against major world powers pays off, state television reported.

"People and their government's resistance and their demanding their rights will bear fruit," Khamenei said during a meeting with visiting Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, the report said.

The meeting was held on the last day of a three-day visit by the Algerian leader to Tehran.

"The Iranian nation and government achieved all the progress they have despite pressures, sanctions, and threats by the domineering powers," Khamenei said.

Tehran has been at loggerheads with the West for the past five years over its controversial nuclear programme.

During Bouteflika's visit, Tehran and Algiers inked separate agreements on avoiding double taxation and customs cooperation as well as a memorandum of understanding for banking cooperation, the television said.

## Prachanda receives setback as CPN-UML rejects isolating Nepali Congress

PTI, Kathmandu

Ahead of the crucial Friday vote, Maoist chief Prachanda's hopes to become the next prime minister received a fresh setback today with CPN-UML refusing to back his government if it did not include the Nepali Congress of his arch-rival G P Koirala.

"The next government should be a government of national consensus with the inclusion of Nepali Congress," former general secretary of CPN-UML Madhav Kumar Nepal said after a crucial standing committee meeting of the party.

The Maoists, which have 220 seats in the 601-member house, are hoping to form a majority government with support of the CPN-UML that has 103 lawmakers during the August 15 vote in the Constituent Assembly after the latest round of talks on forging "consensus" among mainstream parties failed with Nepali Congress (NC) demanding the defence portfolio.

Outrightly rejecting the NC's condition, Prachanda or Pushpa Kamal Dahal said he would rather sit in the opposition.



Philippine evacuees who fled from the fighting between government troops and Muslim rebels wait for a medical check up at a school building converted into an evacuation centre in Aleosan yesterday. Some 160,000 people have fled their homes and are now housed in various evacuation centres.

## Humanitarian crisis looms in Philippines as fighting continues

AFP, Aleosan

The United Nations has begun airlifting food to the southern Philippines to try to avert a major humanitarian crisis as thousands flee fighting between Muslim rebels and troops, officials said yesterday.

Fighting continued Tuesday as soldiers used artillery and helicopter gunships to pound rebel positions around towns and villages in North Cotabato, a poor farming region on the southern island of Mindanao.

The UN's World Food Programme has begun airlifting 400 tonnes of rice to communities affected by the conflict, with 160,000 people having fled their homes.

At the same time the Commission on Human Rights and politicians have called for a halt to the fighting to avert a humanitarian crisis.

According to the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDDC) 43 evacuation centres have been set up for the refugees but they are now overcrowded and fast becoming health hazards.

"This is turning into a humani-

tarian mess," congresswoman Risa Hontiveros said Tuesday.

"The refugee crisis is an unacceptable cost of the government's mismanagement of the peace process. A peace process should lead to the protection of life and property, and yet what's happening is the opposite," said Hontiveros, who has called for an immediate halt to the fighting.

Fighting began last week after the Supreme Court ordered the government to suspend plans to establish an extended Muslim homeland in the southern Philippines.

The decision saw around 1,500 heavily armed renegade Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels take control of mainly Christian villages and towns in North Cotabato province.

They have ignored requests by their leadership to leave.

The WFP fully understands that the situation remains fluid, and we will continue to work closely with all concerned to further assess the total number of affected persons and adjust our response accordingly," the UN agency said in a statement issued in Manila.

## Three dead as unrest flares in China's restive Xinjiang

AFP, Beijing

Three security officers were killed in China's remote northwest yesterday, state media reported, raising the death toll from over a week of unrest there that has flared during the Olympics to 31.

Assaults jumped off a vehicle passing through a checkpoint in the Xinjiang region and stabbed four security officers, killing three of them and injuring the other, the Xinhua news agency reported.

The attack was the third in eight days in Xinjiang, a vast desert region bordering central Asia that is experiencing its biggest spike in violence in years.

Analysts attribute the surge to separatists from Xinjiang's repressed Muslim Uighur ethnic minority who are seeking to raise publicity for their cause while world attention is on China for the Beijing Olympics, which began last week.

China has also repeatedly warned that "terrorists" from Xinjiang are trying to sabotage the Games, but insisted massive security across the country will ensure there is no direct attack on the Olympics.

## Mladic sheltered by Serbian military

Says a minister

AFP, Berlin

Ratko Mladic, the former Yugoslavia's most wanted war crimes fugitive, sheltered between 2002-5 at properties owned by the Serbian military and in Belgrade apartments, a Serbian minister told a German magazine.

"Between June 1 2002 and the end of 2005 he sought refuge in three properties owned by the military and in several Belgrade apartments," said Rasim Ljajic, Serbia's minister in charge of cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

He told German weekly Spiegel that "many people" were aware that the former Bosnian Serb military commander was being hidden by the military, but they kept quiet because they were opposed to him being handed over to the ICTY.

"Unfortunately we only discovered this afterwards," Ljajic told Spiegel in an interview published this week.

"On the other hand Mladic's stay in Belgrade was only known to

a few people," the magazine quoted him as saying in comments published in German.

Mladic, indicted by the ICTY for genocide and crimes against humanity for atrocities including the Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Muslims during Bosnia's 1992-1995 war, has been on the run for more than a decade.

The 66-year-old is the most wanted war crimes fugitive after the arrest in Belgrade last month of Radovan Karadzic, his wartime political leader.

Karadzic was arrested riding a suburban bus through the Serbian capital Belgrade disguised as the hirsute healer, Doctor Dragan Dabic. He made his first appearance before the UN war crimes court in The Hague on July 31.

## Running slows aging process

AFP, Washington

Running can slow the aging process, according to a study conducted over two decades by American researchers and published on Monday.

The study by the Stanford University School of Medicine found that people over 50 who ran regularly over several years suffered fewer disabilities, had a longer span of active life and reduced their risk of dying early by 50 percent compared to those who were inactive.

"The study has a very pre-exercise message," said James Fries, MD, an emeritus professor at the medical school and the study's senior author.

"If you had to pick one thing to make people healthier as they age, it would be aerobic exercise."

The study, published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, tracked 538 people over 50 who had run several times a week since 1984 and compared them to a similar group of non-runners.

As the subjects aged, the health gap between the runners and non-runners widened, continuing even into their 90s.

"We did not expect this," said Fries, 69, himself an avid runner. "The health benefits of exercise are greater than we thought."

## Olmert offers Palestinians 93 pct of West Bank

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has offered a peace plan giving the Palestinians 93 percent of the occupied West Bank, an Israeli newspaper said on Tuesday.

But the Palestinians denied the report.

Israel's Haaretz newspaper said the proposed border is at the heart of a broader plan that would compensate the Palestinians with the equivalent of 5.5 percent of the West Bank adjacent to the Gaza Strip and a route connecting Gaza to the West Bank itself.

However, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas would only receive the land and the overland connection once his forces retake the Gaza Strip from the Islamist Hamas movement, which seized power in the coastal territory in June 2007, the newspaper said.

But Palestinian negotiator Saeb

Erakat said the report was "baseless."

"These are half-truths used by Israelis as a test balloon so they can blame the Palestinian authority should the negotiations fail," Erakat told AFP.

Haaretz said the proposal has been offered in the context of US-backed peace talks relaunched in November with the goal of resolving the decades-old conflict by the end of the year.

The proposed agreement however would be a "shelf agreement" to be implemented in the coming months and years, and would not immediately include the thorny issue of the future status of Jerusalem, Haaretz said.

The Palestinians have demanded mostly Arab east Jerusalem, which Israel occupied and annexed in the 1967 Six Day War, as their capital, while Israel considers the entire Holy City its "eternal, undivided" capital -- a

claim not recognised by the international community.

The agreement would however include a complex solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, allowing some refugees from the 1948 war to return to Israel while settling most of the 4.5 million refugees and their descendants in the Palestinian state.

The seven percent of the West Bank annexed by Israel would include the major settlement blocs around Jerusalem -- home to most of the 250,000 Israeli settlers in the territory -- and some settlements in the northern West Bank.

The final Palestinian state would be demilitarised.

Erakat dismissed the idea of a partial agreement. "We are not a bazaar," he said. "We want a complete Israeli withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, and agreement on all the final status questions," he added.

## Lebanon president in historic trip to Syria

AFP, Damascus

Lebanese President Michel Sleiman heads on Wednesday for a groundbreaking visit to Damascus carrying an agenda loaded with thorny issues, including the establishment of diplomatic ties.

The two-day visit is the first by a Lebanese head of state since a 2005 Syrian troop pullout from Lebanon in the aftermath of the murder of ex-premier Rafiq Hariri.

The summit between Sleiman and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad aims to redefine ties between Beirut and Damascus, which dominated Lebanon for three decades until it withdrew its forces.

The agenda features prickly issues such as a border demarcation, a review of longstanding accords, Lebanese detainees in Syria and the presence of radical pro-Syrian Palestinian groups in Lebanon, diplomatic sources said.

According to a Lebanese official in Beirut, the establishment of diplomatic relations and opening of embassies will top the agenda.

## Koda should quit as Jharkhand CM, says Soren

PTI, New Delhi

JMM chief Shibu Soren yesterday staked claim for Chief Ministership of Jharkhand, demanding that the incumbent Madhu Koda should quit soon, failing which support to the state government will be withdrawn.

"The decision regarding making me Jharkhand CM was taken long back but it is getting delayed. Hence, we arrived at the decision to withdraw support for Koda government if he does not resign now," said Soren after a meeting of leaders from Jharkhand at his residence in New Delhi.

At the same time, he claimed that the "UPA high command has directed Madhu Koda to resign and facilitate my oath taking. I will take oath as new CM as soon as he resigns there".

The JMM leader also claimed that besides Chief Ministership to him, the party will be getting two portfolios, one cabinet rank and a minister for state berth, at the Centre.



Georgians rally in front of the parliament building in central Tbilisi yesterday to protest against the ongoing armed conflicts involving Russia, Georgia, and the Georgian breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Thaksin's political career in peril as exile beckons

AFP, Bangkok

Ousted Thai premier Thaksin Shinawatra's retreat into exile marks a dark day in his turbulent political career, analysts say, but could be a chance for his allies and enemies to heal rifts in society.

After a weekend of intense rumours, Thaksin on Monday skipped a required court appearance and flew to England, saying he believed political interference in Thailand would rob him of a fair trial on corruption charges.

The billionaire businessman launched a wide-ranging attack on the justice system, which has been piling up the cases against Thaksin and his wife Pojaman since the September 2006 coup.

The couple's exit, relayed to Thai media in a handwritten note, followed Thaksin's confident homecoming in February this year when he fell to his knees and kissed the

ground ending 18 months in self-imposed exile.

"His enemies executed a political decapitation of Thaksin; it is practically impossible for him to return to power," said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political analyst from Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

"He's not coming back any time in the foreseeable future."

The Supreme Court has so far agreed to hear three corruption cases against Thaksin, and more are pending.

On July 31, a criminal court convicted Pojaman of tax evasion and sentenced her to three years in jail.

"I think he was hurt by the court's verdict against his wife," said Thawee Suraritkul, a professor at Sukhothai Thammathiraj University.

But Chris Baker, a Thai historian, said that the tycoon's hold over the

kingdom will not necessarily fade.

The story has got a couple more episodes yet, he told AFP. "There is some defiance in his dramatic handwritten note... When you see leaders like this, they live in the public imagination when you take them out of the country."

Former policeman Thaksin, 59, was a divisive leader who changed Thailand's political landscape, winning 2001 elections on a platform, which for the first time addressed rural voters' concerns.

He extended his grip in 2005 polls, but throughout his two terms Thaksin dodged allegations of nepotism and corruption, and the tax-free sale of his company in January 2006 brought massive street protests.

Thaksin called new elections, but the generals stepped in first.

Although the old power cliques in the military, palace and bureaucracy seemed determined to wipe

Thaksin off the political map and erase his influence, the majority of the citizens appeared to disagree.

In elections that brought an end to military rule in December last year, a new outfit called the People Power Party (PPP) emerged, made up of former members of Thaksin's by-then disbanded Thai Rak Thai party.

Led by veteran politician Samak Sundaravej -- a gruff right-winger with a common touch -- they scored a comfortable win in the polls, further infuriating the middle class and elite.

Just months after Samak formed his coalition government in February, Thaksin's old foe in the royalist People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) were back on the streets.

They want Samak to resign despite his mandate from the electorate as they claim he is running the country on behalf of Thaksin.



Indian Railway employees are watched by bystanders and passengers from a passing train as they examine wreckage at the site where two express trains collided at Brij Vihar in Ghaziabad some 12 km east of New Delhi yesterday. One person was killed and at least three others injured when two Express trains, on the same track, collided near Sahibabad, about 12 km east of the Indian capital.