

20 killed in chemical plant blasts in China

AP, Beijing

The death toll from explosions that ripped through a chemical plant in southwest China rose to 20 yesterday, state media said.

The victims were employees of the plant in Yizhou city in Guangxi province, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Another 60 people were injured in the blasts that started at about 6 am Tuesday and continued until 1 pm, the report said.

The blaze started in a workshop and spread through the plant as containers with flammable chemicals including formaldehyde and acetylene caught fire, Xinhua said.

Fire spread over a nearly 108,000-square-foot area, Xinhua said, citing an unidentified firefighter from the rescue operation.

The government evacuated 11,500 residents in case of further blasts and chemical leaks.

Poisonous gases, mainly sulfured hydrogen and carbon monoxide, were still coming from the site, Xinhua quoted Ge Xianmin,

Guangxi's toxic substances emergency center director, as saying.

The blast did not seriously pollute air or water in the area, Xinhua said. Rescuers set up four dams at the point where pollutants are discharged from the factory to prevent any from flowing into the nearby Longjiang River, Xinhua said.

Samples taken from the river show it is safe for drinking, it said.

Regional work safety authorities were investigating the cause of the blasts.

Fan Yinfeng, an operator at the fire brigade under the Yizhou Public Security Bureau, said firefighters from nearby towns were mobilized to help.

The plant is in a development zone of Yizhou city and mainly produces chemicals for adhesives and paints, Xinhua said. It is owned by Guangxi Guangwei Chemical Co.

Thousands die each year in China from fires, explosions and other industrial accidents often blamed on insufficient safety equipment and workers ignoring safety rules.



PHOTO: AFP
An elderly couple cleans inside a destroyed building in the South Ossetian town of Tskhinvali yesterday. China meanwhile had no comment about Russia recognizing the independence of two rebel Georgian provinces, continuing its policy of saying virtually nothing about the situation.

Georgia downgrades ties with Russia

AFP, Tbilisi

Georgia yesterday announced it was downgrading its relations with Russia as Tbilisi vowed to wage a diplomatic offensive against Moscow over its recognition of two rebel regions.

Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili told AFP that Tbilisi was pulling all but two of its diplomats from its embassy in Moscow and was seeking Western support for a range of measures against Russia.

"We have downgraded the level of our diplomatic relations with Russia," she told AFP in an interview.

Georgia would seek to boost ties with NATO and the EU, and would call for an international peacekeeping force in Georgia.

Parliament is also preparing an "Occupation Act" that will formally declare Georgian territories under Russian control as occupied.

Shota Malashkia, the chairman of parliament's reintegration committee, told Georgian Public Television:

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said in a televised address Tuesday that he had signed

"We will not have an ambassador to Moscow any more, only one senior diplomat and one low-ranking diplomat will be working in our embassy to the Russian Federation."

She warned that the situation would remain under review.

Georgia had already recalled its ambassador from Moscow in April, following a decision by Russia to establish formal ties with rebel governments in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said in a televised address Tuesday that he had signed

a decree recognizing South Ossetia -- the catalyst for this month's five-day military conflict with Georgia and Abkhazia.

In a televised address to the nation Tuesday, Saakashvili described the move as "the first attempt in Europe after Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union... to change the borders of Europe by force."

Saakashvili accused Russia of seeking to "break the Georgian state, undermine the fundamental values of Georgia and to wipe Georgia from the map."

Russia's recognition of the rebel regions prompted immediate censure from the United States, which has been a strong supporter of Saakashvili, and its allies.

Russia on Wednesday warned NATO against building up naval forces in the Black Sea as the US Coast Guard cutter Dallas docked in Georgia carrying aid, one of three ships sent by Washington to deliver relief supplies.

Israel jails Hamas mayor for six years

AFP, Jerusalem

An Israeli military court has sentenced the Hamas mayor of the occupied West Bank town of Jenin to six years in prison, the military said on Tuesday.

Hatem Jarar, a 62-year-old orthopaedic surgeon, was among a string of elected officials from the Islamist movement detained by the Israeli military following the capture of Corporal Gilad Shalit in a deadly cross-border raid from Gaza by Hamas and other militants in June 2006.

Jarar, who was elected mayor in January 2005, was convicted at a hearing in Salem, outside Jenin, last Thursday of membership of a "terrorist organisation, an army statement said.

The presiding judge said he considered the fact that the accused was a doctor "expected to save human lives" was an aggravating factor when he handed down sentence, the statement said.

Jenin deputy mayor Eka Chati told reporters that the proceedings had "no legal value" coming as they did after Jarar had spent more than two years in custody without charge or trial.

Israel, like the European Union and the United States, regards Hamas as a terrorist organisation despite its upset win over the Western-backed Fatah movement of president Mahmud Abbas in January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections.

Israel says no peace deal by end of year

AFP, Alexandria

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said on Tuesday that he cannot see a peace deal being reached with the Palestinians before the end of the year, despite US optimism on such an accord.

"We would like to see a breakthrough in the negotiations with the Palestinians before the end of 2008," Barak told journalists in the Egyptian port of Alexandria after talks with President Hosni Mubarak.

"In fact I believe that the parties have succeeded in moving their understandings of what needs to be achieved and indeed their positions somewhat closer together over this period of time," Rice said.

The declarations came after US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, on a visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories, and Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni both voiced optimism over the peace

talks. "We continue to find the way to reach an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians," Livni told reporters. "Even in these hectic days we continue to negotiate."

On her way to the region, Rice said that "We continue to have the same goal which is to reach agreement by the end of the year."

In Israel, Rice said progress was being made despite difficulties, and was "very heartened by the fact that the negotiations are serious and they are intensive".

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The two sides formally relaunched the peace process after a seven-year hiatus at a US-hosted conference last November, with the goal of signing a full peace deal by the time President George W. Bush leaves office in January 2009.



PHOTO: AFP FILE
A combo of file pictures shows Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi (L) at a press conference in the Libyan capital Tripoli on July 9, 2008 and a reproduction of a photo taken in the 1970s of Lebanese Shiite Muslim religious leader, Imam Musa al-Sadr, the founder of the Amal movement, which played a major role in Lebanon's civil war between 1975 and 1990. Sadr, who was the head of the Higher Shitate Council in Lebanon, vanished while on a trip to Libya in 1978. Lebanon has issued an arrest warrant for the Libyan leader over Sadr's disappearance, officials in Beirut said yesterday. Gaddafi was also indicted for allegedly "inciting the abduction" of Imam Musa Sadr, investigating magistrate Sami al-Hajj said in a charge sheet.

RETired ARMED FORCES OFFICERS' WELFARE ASSOCIATION (RAOWA) NOTICE INVITING APPLICATION FOR PRE-QUALIFICATION

- Retired Armed Forces Officers' Welfare Association (RAOWA) has decided to pre-qualify the interested Construction contractors / firm for Construction of Project "RAOWA Complex" at Mohakhali, Dhaka.
- Documents containing terms and conditions, instruction to applicant and Prescribed form will be available in the office of the undersigned on payment of non-refundable amount of Tk.10,000/- (Ten thousand) only in the form of pay order / bank draft in favour of RAOWA during office hour on all working days including Saturday between September 01, 2008 and September 10, 2008.
- The updated information in Prescribed Form with required documents & certificate shall be submitted in the office of The President, Technical Committee for Construction of RAOWA Complex Building, VIP Road, New DOHS Mohakhali, Dhaka-1206 on all working days during office hour on or before September 15, 2008.
- Eligibility of Contractors: The Contractors should have the experience in construction of High-rise Commercial Building (at least 12 storied) with at least Double Basement and having an Average Annual Turn-over of Tk.50.00 (fifty) crore during last 03 (three) years.
- The authority reserves the right to reject or accept any application without assigning any reason thereof.

Maj Gen Mustafa Kamaluddin, ndu, psc (Retd.)
President, Technical Committee for Construction of RAOWA Complex



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- Must have sound knowledge of Decision Support and Evaluation System.
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Only short-listed candidates will be contacted

Opposition slates Mugabe's plans

AFP, Harare

the new cabinet it's a declaration of war against the people. You can't just have a cabinet without a mandate," MDC spokesman Nelson Chamisa told AFP.

Chamisa accused Mugabe of trying to "hijack the leadership" of Zimbabwe and said the veteran leader was trying to ride roughshod over his political opponents.

"He should wait for the conclusion of the dialogue together with the MDC, and Mr Tsangirai, on the way forward. Otherwise what he is doing is a recipe for disaster."

Chamisa said the talks remained stalled and appealed to Mbeki and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) which appointed him mediator to urgently intervene as Zimbabwe was "sliding and gliding into anarchy".

Mugabe's move leaves the power-sharing negotiations -- stalled for the past two weeks -- in tatters, and outlines the scale of the task facing mediator Thabo Mbeki, the South African president, to get them back on track.

Mugabe spoke at a lunch Tuesday after the opening of parliament, when he was still apparently rattled by the jeers with which the opposition drowned out his ceremonial opening speech.

"We shall soon be setting up a government. The MDC does not want to come in apparently," the government newspaper, The Herald, quoted him as saying.

The comments drew an angry response from the both factions of the opposition.

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party divisions after the bruising primary race, and Obama said afterwards he thought it was an "outstanding" address.

"She gave a great speech last night," agreed Giuliani, who failed in his own bid to carry the Republican crown into the November 4 elections losing to John McCain.

"Why isn't she the vice-presidential candidate. Why isn't she the presidential candidate," he added, once again picking at the Democrat's wounds with many Clinton supporters still distraught at her defeat.

He said on Fox and Friends he had been convinced that Obama would pick Clinton as his running mate and "I couldn't understand why he would organize a convention to give the Clintons two nights and then diss Hillary as vice-president."

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debate over whether the president-elect had been "outstanding" or "outstanding in office".

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AFP, Denver

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"I think she gave a very good speech from her point of view and our point of view, but not necessarily for Barack Obama's point of view," he told Fox News.

"She never really answered the key question, is he prepared to be president? Which is the issue she put out there, rather dramatically, during the primaries."

Clinton brought the Democratic convention to Denver on its feet late Tuesday with a powerful speech ordering her supporters to unite behind Obama, who defeated her in the nominating contests.

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