

Woman rescued from sea after 24 hours of Philippines ferry sinking

AFP, Zamboanga

A woman was rescued Monday from the sea off the southern Philippines, more than 24 hours after a passenger ferry she was on sank, the navy said.

"She's alive. She was rescued by air force para-jumpers," regional navy commander Rear Admiral Alexander Pama announced in this southern port city.

Pama identified the woman as Lita Casunglong, who is believed to be one of two people previously listed as missing from the Superferry 9, which sank off the coast of Zamboanga peninsula early Sunday.

The ferry was carrying 968 people when it sank, and the coast guard had earlier said 957 had so far been rescued, with nine fatalities.



PHOTO: AFP

Internally displaced Pakistani civilians wait for transport at a bus terminal in Karachi to return to their home to the Swat Valley yesterday. More than 1.6 million civilians have been returned to their homes since the repatriation started on July 13.

Pakistani forces kill 33 insurgents

Thousands of civilians flee battles

AFP, AP, Peshawar

Thousands of civilians have fled Pakistan's northwest Khyber tribal region where the latest military offensive killed 33 more suspected militants Sunday.

The military launched an offensive in the tribal district, home to the famed Khyber pass into neighbouring Afghanistan, six days ago after a suicide bomber blew himself up near a border post killing 22 policemen.

"Security forces today targeted Tarkhokas camp (and) Narai Baba Markaz," the paramilitary Frontier Corps said in a statement in English.

"Both centres and six vehicles got destroyed. Thirty-three militants also got killed in this operation."

The military destroyed two training centres and 15 militant homes on Sunday, killing 33 alleged insurgents, a statement from paramilitary forces operating in the area said. Nine more were taken into custody and two people kidnapped by militants were recovered.

The region is largely off-limits to journalists, making it difficult to verify the information independently.

Pakistan is under intense US pressure to crack down on insurgents along its border with Afghanistan, especially the lawless tribal belt where al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden is suspected to be hiding. The US believes militants use Pakistan's tribal areas as safe havens from which to plan attacks on Western troops across the frontier in

Afghanistan.

Frontier Corps spokesman Major Fazl Rehman said helicopter gunships and fighter jets strafed the insurgent boltholes, with the strikes targeting fighters with the Lashkar-e-Islam (Army of Islam).

Lashkar-e-Islam is a militant group battling the government in Khyber, which sits between Pakistan's north-west capital Peshawar and Afghanistan.

The group has some ties to the Pakistan Taliban, headquartered further south in the semi-autonomous district of South Waziristan.

On Saturday, the army said 43 militants had been killed in Khyber, but their tolls are impossible to confirm independently.

Taiwan PM quits over handling of typhoon

AFP, Taipei

Taiwan's premier quit Monday over the government's handling of last month's deadly typhoon as the China-friendly administration struggled to end its worst crisis since it came to power.

Liu Chao-shui's surprise announcement ended weeks of speculation about the political fallout of Typhoon Morakot, which was the worst to hit Taiwan in half a century and killed over 600.

"Someone has to take political responsibility," Liu told a hastily called press conference.

Later Monday, a spokesman for President Ma Ying-jeou said the chief secretary of Taiwan's ruling party had been named as the new premier.

Swine flu kills Ecuador president's security chief

AP, Quito

The Ecuadorean government says President Rafael Correa's chief of security has died of swine flu.

The online government publication El Ciudadano says air force Lt. Col. John Merino died Sunday after being hospitalised for 28 days.

El Ciudadano cited as its source Francisco Torres, the doctor for the office of the Presidency, which was closed late Sunday.

The publication said Correa expressed his condolences to Merino's family at the military hospital where he died.

Burglary at gym of Indian president

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

In a security breach at the high-security official residence-cum-office of Indian President Pratibha Patil, a computer monitor, CPU and three pairs of dumbbells were allegedly stolen from a gym in Chanakyapuri area of New Delhi.

The police said the incident occurred on the night of September 3 and the matter was reported to the police the next morning. Patil is now on an overseas tour.

"We got a complaint from the caretaker of the health club, Tasneem Ahmed, that a monitor, CPU and few dumbbells are missing from the office of a health club near the gate number 17 of Rashtrapati Bhavan," a senior police officer said.

The police have lodged an FIR and begun investigations.

Sharifs soften stance against Musharraf trial under Saudi pressure

ANI, Islamabad

The Sharif brothers and top leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) are believed to have softened their demand for the trial of former President Pervez Musharraf owing to international pressure by his guarantors, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Well-placed party sources said that the PML-N central leadership would take the party hierarchy into confidence about the pressure for softening their anti-Musharraf stance and to chalk out the party's new plan of action to prepare it for next

elections at party's scheduled CEC meeting in Murree on Monday.

Sources attach great importance to Nawaz Sharif's visit to Saudi Arabia in next few days where apart from performing Umrah he is expected to meet the Saudi high-ups in the backdrop of Musharraf's recent visit to the Kingdom and his meeting with the King Abdullah.

The Nation quoted sources as saying that Saudi authorities have already conveyed to the Sharifs to take soft stance on Musharraf's trial as the Kingdom regards him needy for help and cooperation as they were while out of power.

US troops stormed thru Afghan hospital

Says Charity

AP, Kabul

A Swedish charity accused American troops Monday of storming through a hospital in central Afghanistan, breaking down doors and tying up staff in a search for militants. The US military said it was investigating.

The allegation that soldiers violated the neutrality of a medical facility follows the reported deaths of Afghan civilians in a US airstrike in the country's north last week.

Nearly eight years after the US-led coalition invaded

to oust the Taliban, foreign forces are working to persuade the population to support the Afghan government. But civilian deaths and intrusive searches of homes have bred resentment.

The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan said the US Army's 10th Mountain Division entered the charity's hospital without permission to look for insurgents in Wardak province, southwest of Kabul, according to the charity's country director, Anders Fange.



PHOTO: AFP

An Afghan man looks yesterday at a house damaged by a rocket that was fired Sunday night in Kabul. The rocket killed three members of one family and injured two others, Afghan officials said Monday.

Unicef rails against Lankan expulsion order

AFP, Colombo

The United Nations Children's Fund reacted furiously yesterday to Sri Lanka's decision to expel its spokesman over his allegedly pro-rebel stance in the final stages of the island's ethnic war.

James Elder, communications chief for Unicef in Sri Lanka, was accused by the government of issuing "propaganda" in support of the Tamil Tiger separatists before their defeat at the hands of government forces in May.

"We are extremely disappointed with the allegations and we reject them unequivocally," Sarah Crowe, Unicef's regional communications chief, told AFP while visiting Kathmandu.

Crowe said Sri Lanka "had made blatant and unacceptable accusations" and that a meeting on Monday between Unicef and government officials in Colombo had failed to resolve the dispute.

Foreign Secretary Palitha Kohona on Sunday accused Elder of being biased towards the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who had fought for decades to establish an independent Tamil homeland.

"Mr Elder was doing propaganda in support of the LTTE," Kohona told AFP. "It was unacceptable. UN officials are meant to be impartial and the government took a very dim view of it."

"Towards the end of the conflict, he issued statements that were not researched, not exactly based on fact, but reflective of the LTTE."

As the government neared victory over the Tigers, Elder spoke of the "unimaginable hell" suffered by children caught up in the fighting.

In April he said hundreds of children had been killed in the previous months of battle and that those who survived were "living in dire circumstances, caught in the crossfire."



PHOTO: AFP

James Elder, spokesman for Unicef in Sri Lanka, talks on his mobile phone as he walks into the Immigration Controller's office in Colombo yesterday. Sri Lanka is reviewing a move to expel a senior United Nations official over comments he made during the final weeks of the country's decades long ethnic war.



PHOTO: AFP

Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chairman Yasin Malik (3rd L, with flowers) is seen with Mashal Malik (3rd R) upon return to his residence in Srinagar yesterday. Mashal, a Pakistani national, and Yasin were recently got married in Pakistan. The 40-year-old Yasin Malik is one of the first five JKLF commanders who launched a militant movement in Kashmir in 1989.

Central Asia tensions threaten world

Says Indian president

AFP, Dushanbe

Growing religious and ethnic tension in ex-Soviet Central Asia poses one of the most significant threats to world peace and stability, Indian President Pratibha Patil said on Monday.

During a visit to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, Patil sounded the alarm over the deteriorating security situation in the region, which experts say is driven by instability in war-ravaged Afghanistan.

"The spread of intolerance and hatred throughout the region threatens the entire

world and is a dangerous phenomenon following the end of the Cold War," she told reporters here, according to comments released by her press service.

"I call on the leaders of the governments of Central Asia to arrange for the destruction of terrorism in all its forms," she said.

A string of incidents, from a suicide bombing in Uzbekistan in May to gun battles with suspected militants in Tajikistan this summer, have heightened fears that the predominantly Muslim region may be sliding out of control.

Pak Air Force using drones only for surveillance

ANI, Islamabad

The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) has said that it is using unmanned aerial vehicles for intelligence gathering and surveillance and not for attacking targets.

Clarifying the media reports regarding use of drones to attack targets, the PAF statement said that "drones are used by us only for intelligence-gathering and surveillance."

The statement also said that the rank and name of the Chief of Air Staff has also been published incorrectly. "His complete rank and name is Air Chief Marshal Rao Qamar Suleman."

CPI-M to launch 'rectification campaign' soon

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

The two-day politburo meeting of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) that concluded here Sunday decided to prepare a draft document for its 'rectification campaign' to inculcate in its cadres the 'living culture based on communist values.'

The draft will be placed before the central committee meeting of the party to be held Oct 23-25, said a party communiqué.

The CPI-M has been searching for the reasons for its worst ever debacle in the April-May Lok Sabha elections with its tally falling to 16 seats from 43 in the 2004 elections.

"The politburo had a discussion on the content of the document for the rectification campaign. On the basis of this discussion, a draft will be prepared to be placed before the next central committee meeting," the communiqué said.

The politburo will meet again Oct 11 to discuss the document.

Maldives too broke to attend climate summit

AFP, Male

The Maldives, one of the countries most at risk from rising sea levels, will not attend this year's Copenhagen summit on climate change because the atoll nation is broke, its president said Monday.

President Mohamed Nasheed told reporters in the capital Male that his newly elected government had no

money to fund his visit to the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen in December.

"We can't go to Copenhagen because we don't have the money," Nasheed said, adding that he was staying away to set an example of cost-savings to the rest of the government.

Nasheed, the first democratically elected president of the tiny Indian Ocean archi-

pelago, said the one-billion-dollar economy was in serious trouble with the budget deficit shooting to a record 34 percent of gross domestic product.

A one-metre (3.3-foot) rise in sea level would almost totally submerge the country's 1,192 coral islands scattered off southern India, making the exotic holiday destination a cause celebre in the fight against climate change.

Cambodian PM warns more Khmer Rouge trials may ignite war

AFP, Phnom Penh

Cambodian premier Hun Sen on Monday renewed strong warnings his country could be plunged back into civil war if the UN-backed Khmer Rouge court tried more suspects from the late 1970s movement.

Hun Sen, himself a former low level commander in the communist regime, made his speech less than a week after the

court said it could open investigations against more members of the government which killed up to two million people.

"If you tried (more suspects) without taking national unification and peace into consideration and if war re-occurred, killing between 200,000 and 300,000 people more, who would be responsible for it?" the premier told a ceremony.

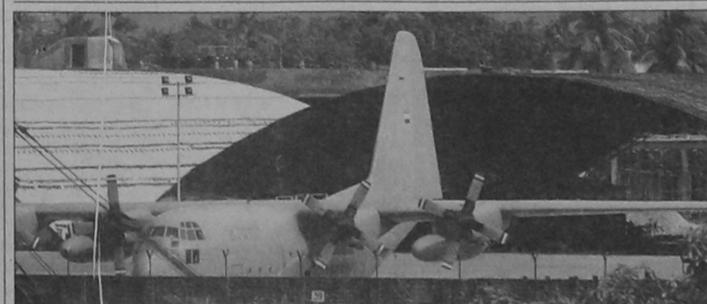


PHOTO: AFP

A United Arab Emirates Air Force C-130 transport aircraft is seen near hangar bays at the Netaji Subhash Bose International Airport in Kolkata yesterday. Indian authorities have detained the UAE Air Force plane that landed in Kolkata on its way to China after discovering arms and explosives on board.