

AIR INDIA CRASH

Survivors tell of miracle escape

AFP, India

Some of the survivors who crawled or were carried from the burning remains of a plane that crashed in India yesterday told of their escape amid scenes of horror and death.

At least 158 people died after the plane overshot the runway and plunged down a steep slope when coming in to land near the southern city of Mangalore on a flight from Dubai.

"The plane veered off toward some trees on the side and then the cabin filled with smoke," Umer Farooq, his face covered in burn cream, told the NDTV news channel at a local hospital.

"The plane overshot the runway only to stop inside a forest area... it burst into flames," he said. "I got caught in some cables but managed to scramble out."

"My hands, face and legs are all burnt. There was an announcement that the plane would land in 15 minutes. There was lot of smoke fire inside; there was no way to get out. I think the plane hit something."

he had managed to escape as the plane's fuselage smashed open.

"There was no warning to passengers about any trouble and it appeared a smooth landing," Manikutty told the Press Trust of India.

"Immediately on touching the ground, the aircraft jerked and in a few moments hit something. Then it split in the middle and caught fire. I just jumped from the gap," he said.

A police official said one of the survivors, a seven-year-old boy, later died from injuries.

"I thought the flight would come to a stop soon and prepared myself to get down," Putturismail Abdulla, who works in the Gulf, told the UNI press agency.

"But there was a big burst sound. Soon I saw the aircraft breaking into two near me. Out of sheer desperation I jumped out and ran to safety."

"Looking back I saw the aircraft breaking down into pieces and caught fire. God saved my life. Despite injuries in the leg, I went to a nearby village and called my friend who picked me up and took me to a hospital."

Television pictures showed rescue teams struggling under mud slopes to the wreckage site, where many bodies remained inside the plane.

"One of my co-passengers fell into the fire while one escaped with me through the opening that was made after the plane broke into two," Abdul Puthur, a shop manager in Dubai who was returning home after five months, said.

"It all happened within a few seconds. I found another person. Together we walked for about 20 minutes through the jungle before locals came and helped us."

Families waiting at the airport for their relatives and friends wept uncontrollably as emergency workers rushed to the disaster scene.

"I can't believe I survived the crash," said GK Pradeep reliving the moments before the tragedy.

"There were vibrations before the plane crashed... as soon as it hit the ground, I managed to get out and jump into a pit. There was smoke all over as the plane caught fire. After ten minutes, there was an explosion," he said.

Ministers on Afghan visit want troops out

AFP, Kabul

Senior cabinet ministers, led by new Foreign Secretary William Hague, arrived in Afghanistan yesterday with a warning that Britain wants to withdraw its troops as soon as possible.

Hague, Defence Secretary Liam Fox and International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell are set to meet President Hamid Karzai in their first visit to the country since the coalition government took power in London this month.

Hague described Afghanistan -- where around 10,000 British troops are helping fight a Taliban-led insurgency well into its ninth year -- as "our most urgent priority" in comments released from London as the party touched down.

In an interview with The Times before arriving in Kabul, Fox made clear the visit would focus on speeding up the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan, and that no new troops would be deployed.

Somaliland-Ethiopia border clash kills 13

BBC ONLINE

At least 13 people have died in a clash between Somalis and Ethiopian forces who had crossed the border, village elders told the BBC.

Elders said three Ethiopian soldiers and at least 10 residents of Buhoodle district in Somaliland were killed in a shoot-out after a dispute at a checkpoint.

Residents say Ethiopia troops regularly cross into southern and central Somalia and fight Islamists controlling their towns, according to Reuters news agency.

But it is believed to be the first time that they have sought to do this in the semi-autonomous region of Somaliland, which is generally seen as more stable than Somalia.

13-year-old becomes youngest to top Mount Everest

AP, Beijing

A 13-year-old American boy became the youngest climber to reach the top of Mount Everest yesterday, surpassing the previous record set by a 16-year-old Nepalese.

Jordan Romero called his mother by satellite phone from the summit of the world's highest mountain, 29,035 feet (8,850 meters) above sea level. He is now one climb away from his quest to conquer the highest peaks on all seven continents.

"He says, 'Mom, I'm calling you from the top of the world,'" Leigh Anne Drake told The Associated Press from California, where she had watched her son's progress on a GPS tracker online.

"There were lots of tears and 'I love you! I love you!'" Drake said. "I just told him to get his butt back home."

The teenager with long curly hair -- who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa when he was 9 years old -- says he was inspired by a painting in his school hallway of the seven continents' highest summits.

"Every step I take is finally toward the biggest goal of my life, to stand on top of the world," Jordan said earlier on his blog.

The former record for the youngest climber to scale Everest had been held by Temba Tsheri of Nepal. He reached the peak at age 16.

Also Saturday, officials said a Nepalese Sherpa who lives in the Salt Lake City suburb of Draper broke his own world record by climbing Everest for the 20th time. Apa, who goes by one name, went up with fellow climbers on a mission also to collect garbage, a growing environ-



mental problem on the mountain. Mountaineering Department official Tilak Pandey said several climbers took advantage of Saturday's clear weather to reach the summit.

Jordan's climbing team reached the peak hours earlier than expected.

"The first thing, they all hugged each other and said, 'I love you, I can't believe we're finally here' and started crying," said Rob Bailey, the team's spokesman, by phone from the United States.

Jordan, from Big Bear, California, was climbing Everest with his father, his father's girlfriend and three Sherpa guides. He left for the peak from the base camp on the Chinese side.

Everest was his first challenge above 26,240 feet (8,000 meters).



Balinese people pray during a celebration of the Kuningan holiday at a temple in Serangan yesterday. Kuningan holiday, the last day of the Galungan celebrations, is believed to be the ascendent day of ancestral holy spirits back to heaven.

Iraq security forces blamed after car bomb kills 30

AFP, Baquba, Iraq

Iraqi security forces were sharply criticised yesterday a day after a car bomb in a market in central Iraq killed 30 people, in the worst attack to hit the country since May 10.

The town of Khales, the capital of Diyala province, was closed to traffic and stringent checkpoint searches were imposed in nearby Baquba, the capital of Diyala province.

"Khales is a disaster zone," said provincial deputy governor Sadiq al-Husseini, who put the toll at 30 dead and 80 wounded.

"Tomorrow, a meeting of the provincial council will be held to remove from office Diyala police chief Major General Abdul al-Hussein al-Shammari and Khales police chief Brigadier General Khodair al-Timimi," he said. Meanwhile family members of the victims prepared to send the bodies of the dead, who were overwhelmingly Shiite Muslim, to the holy Shiite city of Najaf to be buried.

The bomb exploded near an office of the police rapid reaction force in the Khales, a predominantly Shiite town northeast of Baghdad, which in was divided between Al-Qaeda insurgents and Shiite militiamen in 2006 and 2007.

The latest violence came as political wrangling over the outcome of Iraq's March 7 election rumbles on, with no bloc having yet assembled the parliamentary majority necessary to form a government.

"The repetition of a series of attacks on this city puts many question marks on the way that security is run in the province in general, and in Khales in particular," said Diyala MP Hadi al-Amiri, who hails from Khales.

Pakistan yet to approach Interpol over Kasab, Ansari

PTI, Islamabad

Pakistani authorities were yesterday caught on the wrong foot as an anti-terror court hearing the 26/11 case was told that Interpol was yet to be approached for a Red Corner notice for Ajmal Kasab, weeks after they claimed the matter had been taken up with the Paris-based agency.

The Rawalpindi-based anti-terrorism court conducting the trial of LeT's operations chief Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi and six other suspects in the Mumbai attacks adjourned the case till June 5.

Judge Malik Mohammad Akram Awan adjourned the trial after hearing arguments by the prosecution and defence on whether Kasab and Fahim Ansari could be made part of the trial.

Kasab, the lone terrorist arrested alive during the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, was given death penalty by a Mumbai court earlier this month while Ansari, who was also an accused, was acquitted for want of evidence.

Thai govt accuses foreigners in Bangkok arson

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's government said yesterday that two foreigners were involved in arson attacks on major buildings, unleashed after a crackdown on "Red Shirts" protests in Bangkok.

Thailand's biggest shopping mall, Central World, was left gutted and partly collapsed in Wednesday's mayhem that saw 36 buildings torched, including the stock exchange and bank branches.

"A white Westerner was involved in the arson attack on Central World, convincing them to set fire to it. And an Asian was also involved in the arson attacks on the banks, said government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn.

UN body probes North Korea's possible truce violation

REUTERS, Seoul

The United Nations Command (UNC) has launched an investigation into whether North Korea violated the Korean War armistice by sinking one of the South's naval ships, the UN body said yesterday.

North Korea denounced the probe as a "bogus mechanism." On Thursday, the South announced the results of an investigation which concluded a March fire at torpedo had sank the Cheonan corvette, killing 46 sailors.

The UNC said in a statement it had convened a special team to review the findings of the investigation and to "determine the scope of the armistice violation" that occurred with the sinking of the Cheonan.

The team, which includes 11 countries -- Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States, Sweden and Switzerland -- would report their findings to the United Nations, it added.

North Korea has denied the sinking accusation and said it is ready to tear up all agreements with the South, with which it remains technically at war under a truce that ended fighting in the 1950-53 Korean War.

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Panitan did not give any names but a video of a British man urging the burning and looting of the shopping mall, taken several days before it was set on fire, has been circulating on the YouTube video sharing website.

The man was identified by the British media as Jeff Savage, a resident of the seaside resort of Pattaya, east of Bangkok. In interviews he reportedly defended his conduct but said he did not take part in the arson attack.

The Red Shirts, who are campaigning for elections to replace a government they say is illegitimate, mounted two months of rolling demonstrations that saw clashes and blasts that left 86 dead and 1,900 injured.

In the face of an overwhelming military crackdown, Red leaders surrendered and asked their thousands of supporters to disperse from Bangkok's top shopping district which they had occupied for six weeks.

Clinton avoids China disputes, hands out teddy bears

REUTERS, Shanghai

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton passed out teddy bears to Chinese children as she toured the Shanghai World Expo yesterday and carefully skirted the United States' many policy disputes with China.

At the start of a four-day visit whose centrepiece will be talks in Beijing about strategic and economic matters, Clinton spent a misty morning at the Expo, an emblem of China's rise on the world stage.

Dressed in a powder blue jacket to match the Expo's plump, cartoonish mascot, Clinton walked through the US and Chinese national "pavilions" shaking hands, posing for pictures and talking up the importance of people-to-people ties. She avoided any public discussion of the issues that will occupy her in Beijing, including North Korea's suspected sinking of a South Korean warship, Iran's nuclear programme, and US calls for China to allow its currency to appreciate.

Speaking after her four-hour tour, Clinton suggested the event may mark a watershed in the history of China's financial hub and richest and most cosmopolitan city.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton alongside visitors watches a video, not in the photo, at the US pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo 2010 in Shanghai yesterday.

Advertisement for Electricity Generation Company of Bangladesh (EGC) featuring a table with technical specifications and contact information.