



Elderly Indigenous Balinese participate in the ritual pandanus battle in Tenganan village, Karang Asem, Bali yesterday. During the traditional annual Balinese ritual duel men of all ages do battle armed with a rolled pandanus leaf and a rattan shield to honour the Hindu god of war, Indra. PHOTO: AFP

## 'Poison mail' scare at US embassy

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

At least two employees of the US embassy in Paris, the French capital, are being treated for suspected poisoning after opening mail, it has been reported.

Paul Patin, a spokesman for the US embassy, told reporters at the scene that a number of staff had been taken for medical check-ups yesterday after receiving a "suspicious" letter, but gave no further information.

"We don't know if it was poison. We don't have any confirmation that they were hurt," he said.

A Paris police official told the AP news agency that two of the staff were feeling "unwell" after opening mail and that an investigation was under way.

Other reports suggested three staff may have been involved.

## FBI to help investigate files leak in Afghan war

BBC ONLINE

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates has called in the FBI to help with the inquiry into the leaking of more than 90,000 classified military records.

The documents, published online on Sunday, give details of the Afghan war.

Mr Gates said they were potentially dangerous for US troops and allies, and an "aggressive investigation" would determine how the leaks occurred.

The Wikileaks website, which posted the documents, said they had been compiled by a variety of US units in 2004-09.

"The battlefield consequences of the release of these documents are potentially severe and dangerous for our troops, our allies and Afghan partners, and may well damage our relationships and reputation in that key part of the world," Mr Gates told reporters on Thursday.

He said intelligence sources and methods, as well as military tactics

could "become known to our adversaries".

Mr Gates added that he had called FBI director Robert Mueller on Wednesday and "asked for the FBI's assistance in our investigation as a partner".

"It is important that we have all the resources we need to investigate and assess this breach of national security," he said.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon is looking into a possible connection between soldier Bradley Manning and the new document leaks, according to a statement issued by the US Department of Defense.

Pfc Manning, an army intelligence analyst, was charged with leaking a video of a US helicopter attack in Iraq to Wikileaks last month.

The probe into the document leaks is an extension of the existing open investigation on Pfc Manning, Marine Corps Col Dave Lapan said in a statement.

CASUALTY NUMBERS Wikileaks has said it tried

hard to ensure that the release of the material "does not put innocents at harm", and held back about 15,000 reports.

One of the leaked reports, from 2007, suggests how civilian casualties could be underplayed.

This initial report makes no mention of civilian casualties as a marine convoy near Jalalabad opened fire while tearing back to base after being rammed by an explosives-filled van.

An update to the report states eight Afghan civilians were killed and 34 wounded. A later Afghan Human Rights Commission report into the incident found that 19 civilians had been killed as the marines drove down the highway firing their weapons.

Another leaked report claims members of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency had backed the Taliban in the war in Afghanistan - an accusation strongly denied by Islamabad.

## Philippines starts probe into Arroyo's corruption

AFP, Manila

Philippine President Benigno Aquino on yesterday launched a "Truth Commission" with broad powers to investigate alleged corruption and vote fraud by his predecessor, Gloria Arroyo.

"The process of bringing a necessary closure to the allegations of official wrongdoing and impunity has begun," Aquino said in a statement announcing he had signed an executive order to form the commission.

"It is tasked with investigating and establishing the truth regarding the serious allegations of wrongdoing in the past nine years supposedly involving government officials and their accomplices in the private sector."

The body will look into allegations Arroyo cheated her way to victory in the 2004 presidential election, as well as large-scale corruption cases, Justice Secretary Leila de Lima told reporters.

Among the graft issues to be probed are allegations Arroyo's family and government officials acted improperly in negotiating a 329-million-dollar Internet broadband deal with a Chinese firm, de Lima added.

## China oil spill ranks among worst in history: Greenpeace

AFP, Beijing

An oil spill in northeastern China may have been about 60 times bigger than the government reported, making it among the world's worst known oil disasters, an environmental group said yesterday.

Greenpeace said 60,000-90,000 tonnes of crude, or between 430,000 and 650,000 barrels, may have poured into the Yellow Sea after two pipelines exploded at an oil storage depot in the port of Dalian on July 16.

That figure dwarfs official estimates of 1,500 tonnes spilled.

"It's one of the 30 largest oil spills in human history," said Richard Steiner, a marine conservationist with the University of Alaska and an adviser to Greenpeace.

"If our estimates are correct, it is certainly larger than the Exxon Valdez spill in Alaska in 1989," Steiner told a news conference.

The Exxon Valdez spilled 271,000 barrels after running aground in Prince William Sound in Alaska, affecting 1,770 kilometres (1,100 miles) of coastline.

Steiner said it could take the environment along the coastline of Liaoning province around 10 years, or even longer, to recover from the disaster.

Official estimates said the spill covered more than 435 square kilometres (170 square miles) of water, but one Chinese media report last week said the

slick had spread to 946 square kilometres.

Steiner, who spent one and a half days in Dalian assessing the spill, said the lack of adequate aerial surveillance meant no one really knew the extent of the slick, even suggesting it could have reached North Korea by now.

Greenpeace admitted its estimates could be off by 50 percent -- either higher or lower -- because of the lack of reliable data from the government and oil companies.

China said Monday -- 10 days after the accident -- that the oil spill had been successfully controlled, as operations at Dalian port returned to normal.

Mayor Li Wancai said authorities had achieved a "decisive victory" in the battle to contain the spill, after mobilising 41 oil-skimming vessels, 1,200 fishing boats and oil-eating bacteria, the state-run Dalian Daily reported.

Oil sludge in the sea has mostly been cleaned and the spill has not spread to international waters, the report said.

However, Steiner said there was still oil in the water and on beaches and clean-up efforts would need to continue throughout August and even into the autumn.

Steiner said the discrepancy between the estimates provided by authorities and Greenpeace on the size of the spill was not unusual, with governments and oil companies often understating the size and severity of spills.

However, "the severity of the discrepancy (in China) is unusual," said the expert, who also has spent time in the Gulf of Mexico monitoring the BP disaster.

Greenpeace said it based its estimate on the size of the storage tank that exploded and the amount of oil recovered by thousands of fisherman deployed to help clean up the spill, many using only their bare hands.

A tank containing 90,000 tonnes of crude collapsed after the explosion, with some of the oil burning in the subsequent blaze while the rest spilled into the sea, Greenpeace said.

Oil from another five tanks was deliberately released into the ocean to contain the fire and prevent a nearby tank containing the dangerous chemical dimethylbenzene from exploding, it said.

Greenpeace said the design of the crude storage facility was flawed and had exacerbated the size of the spill.

The economic impact on the local tourism and fishing industry would be "significant", said Steiner, estimating the fishing industry would lose 50-100 million dollars this year alone.

The BP oil spill -- triggered by an April 20 explosion on a rig off the coast of Louisiana -- has resulted in three to 5.2 million barrels of oil gushing into the Gulf of Mexico.

It is likely that the disaster is the worst accidental oil spill in history.



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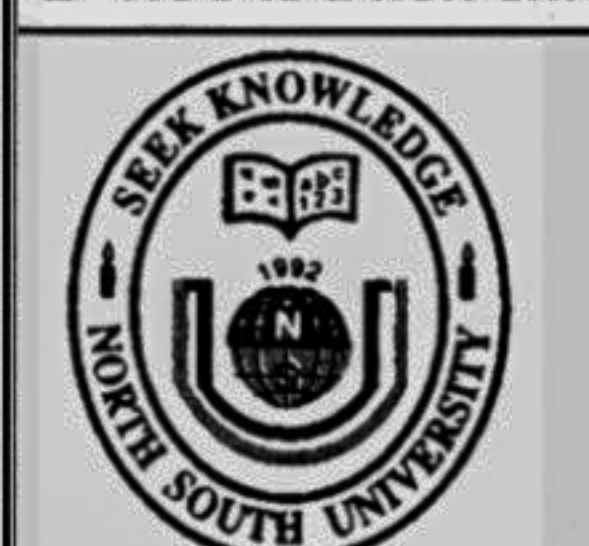
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## UN experts fault Israel on human rights

AFP, Geneva

A UN panel of experts called yesterday on Israel to form in line with international norms on civil rights and to take action against targeted killings, torture and impunity for security forces.

The UN Human Rights Committee also called for an end to the blockade of Gaza and questioned the independence of Israel's own inquiry into a naval raid on a Gaza-bound relief supply ship in which nine Turkish nationals died.

In conclusions on its review of Israel's application of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the committee also urged a halt to restrictions on Palestinians and raised concerns about discrimination.

"The State party should ensure that all alleged cases of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and disproportionate use of force by law enforcement officials, including police, personnel of the security service and the armed forces, are thoroughly and promptly investigated by an authority independent of any of these organs," the committee said.

It also reiterated concern that since 2003, the Israeli armed forces "have targeted and extrajudicially executed 184 individuals in the Gaza Strip, resulting in the collateral unintended death of 155 additional individuals" despite a Supreme Court ruling in 2006 imposing safeguards.

The panel dismissed Israeli assertions that the covenant -- a multilateral treaty ratified by 166 nations including Israel and in force since 1976 -- did not apply in areas under occupation or during armed conflict, saying its government must ensure "full application."

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