

Gulf leaders wary over wavering on final plug

AP, New Orleans

With the oil well that had been spewing into the Gulf of Mexico sealed from the top and BP PLC and federal officials pondering whether the final plug is needed, local officials fear Washington is shifting its focus from what remains a crisis of unknown proportions.

The final stretch of a relief well is being drilled so the crippled well can be permanently sealed deep underground with more mud and cement in what's known as a "bottom kill," though bad weather delayed that work into next week. However, officials now say they may not need to finish it.

And the federal government's point man for the spill response, retired Coast Guard Adm. Thad Allen, hopes he may be able to step down from his post in the next couple of months so long as there's no risk of BP's well leaking again.

"This is going to be a long-term situation," Jefferson Parish Council Chairman John Young said. "I think it's way too early for the federal government to have a 'mission accomplished' type of attitude."

Work on the final kill to the well has been postponed by bad weather blowing through the region. Crews drilling relief wells to the gusher have stopped their work, and will need about four days to finish once the weather passes, Allen said Wednesday.



Flood-displaced Pakistani mother Bushra Humayoun watches over her twins Abdullah, right, and Billal in a hospital after they were born at a college converted to a camp by the army on the outskirts of Nowshera yesterday. Water levels receded in Pakistan on August 12 but survivors of record floods endured grim conditions in makeshift tent cities, as the UN appealed for 460 million dollars in urgent foreign aid. Pakistan's government says 14 million people face direct or indirect harm from the floods.

China's army condemns S Korean-US sea drills

AP, Beijing

China's military yesterday condemned a second round of US-South Korean naval drills planned in the Yellow Sea in the coming weeks, vowing it would respond in kind.

Beijing opposes actions by foreign military ships and planes in waters near its coast that could "affect China's security interests," the military's newspaper People's Liberation Army Daily said in an editorial.

"If no one harms me, I harm no one, but if someone harms me, I must harm them," said the editorial, signed by Maj. Gen. Luo Yuan, a frequent outspoken commentator on military matters.

"As far as the Chinese people and the Chinese military are concerned, these are not joking remarks," Luo wrote.

China has repeatedly criticized the drills, saying they risked heightening tensions on the Korean peninsula and ignored its objections to any foreign military exercises off its coast.

The expected participation of the aircraft carrier USS George Washington is particularly irksome to China because of its status as a symbol of U.S. power in the Pacific and the possibility of its F-18 warplanes flying within range of Beijing.

Ramadan or not, hunger hits Pak flood victims

AP, Multan

Pakistani flood survivors already short on food and water began the fasting month of Ramadan yesterday, a normally festive, social time marked this year by misery and fears of an uncertain future.

The US announced a navy ship with 19 helicopters and 1,000 Marines on board was close to the southern coast of the country and relief flights would soon begin. The UN launched an emergency appeal for international assistance for Pakistan after the already-poor nation was hit with one of its worst-ever natural disasters.

Damage to crops, roads and bridges have caused food prices to triple in some parts of the country, adding to the pain of those marking the fasting month.

"Ramadan or no Ramadan, we are already dying of hunger," said Mai Hakeema, a 50-year-old who sat alongside her ailing husband in a tent outside the city of Sukkur. "We are fasting forcibly, and mourning our losses."

Observant Muslims fast from dawn to dusk each day for a month each year to control their desires and show empathy for the poor. The month is marked by increased attendance at mosques, a rise in charitable giving and family gatherings that coincide with the evening breaking of the fast.

While millions of flood-affected people were performing the fast, Mufti Muneebur Rehman, one of the country's top religious scholars, said victims living in difficult conditions dependent on charity

could skip the fast and perform later in the year. "I am sad to miss the first day of fasting," said Ghulam Fareed of Gorman village in eastern Punjab province. "Later, when we reach home, we will compensate for this."

In the northwest, where many are especially devout, many refugees said flood or no flood, they would fast.

"I cannot disobey God, so I am fasting as it is part of my faith no matter what the conditions are," said Fazal Rabi, 47, who was staying in a tent village in Akbarpura.

The floods hit the country more than two weeks ago, beginning in the northwest before spreading down the country and inundating thousands of villages. Around 1,500 people have been killed, and the UN estimates up to 7 million people need emergency assistance.

On Wednesday, the UN appealed for \$460 million to provide immediate help, including shelter, food, clean water, sanitation and medical care.

"Make no mistake, this is a major catastrophe," UN humanitarian chief John Holmes told diplomats from several dozen countries in launching the appeal in New York. "We have a huge task in front of us. The death toll has so far been relatively low compared to other major natural disasters, but the numbers affected are extraordinarily high."

The United States said it was more than doubling the number of helicopters it is providing to help.

India to rebuild Nalanda University

Ans, New Delhi

A bill for re-establishing the ancient Nalanda University was introduced in the Rajya Sabha yesterday.

The Nalanda University Bill, 2010, will establish a central university in Nalanda district of Bihar, identifying with the ancient university, which was founded in 5th century AD and became a centre of learning for students from all across South Asia.

The bill seeks to develop the university as a seat of learning to attract students from all across South Asia.

"The university will impart education and enable research towards capacity building in the domain of ancient science which was practised in Nalanda several centuries ago," External Affairs Minister SM Krishna said introducing the Bill.

Long hot summer of fire and floods fit predictions

AP, New York

Floods, fires, melting ice and feverish heat: From smoke-choked Moscow to water-soaked Pakistan and the High Arctic, the planet seems to be having a midsummer breakdown. It's not just a portent of things to come, scientists say, but a sign of troubling climate change already under way.

The weather-related cataclysms of July and August fit patterns predicted by climate scientists, the Geneva-based World Meteorological Organization says although those scientists always shy from tying individual disasters directly to global warming.

The experts now see an urgent need for better ways to forecast extreme events like Russia's heat wave and wildfires and the record deluge devastating Pakistan. They'll discuss such tools in meetings this month and next in Europe and America, under United Nations, U.S. and British government sponsorship.

"There is no time to waste," because societies must be equipped to deal with global warming, says British government climatologist Peter Stott.

He said modelers of climate systems are "very keen" to develop supercomputer modeling that would enable more detailed linking of cause and effect as a warming world shifts jet streams and other atmospheric currents. Those changes can wreak havoc.

The UN's network of climate scientists -- the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) -- has long predicted that rising global temperatures would produce more

frequent and intense heat waves, and more intense rainfalls. In its latest assessment, in 2007, the Nobel Prize-winning panel went beyond that. It said these trends "have already been observed," in an increase in heat waves since 1950, for example.

Still, climatologists generally refrain from blaming warming for this drought or that flood, since so many other factors also affect the day's weather.

Stott and Nasa's Gavin Schmidt at the Goddard Institute of Space Studies in New York, said it's better to think in terms of odds: Warming might double the chances for a heat wave, for example. "That is exactly what's happening," Schmidt said, "a lot more warm extremes and less cold extremes."

The WMO did point out, however, that this summer's events fit the international scientists' projections of "more frequent and more intense extreme weather events due to global warming."

In fact, in key cases they're a perfect fit: RUSSIA

It's been the hottest summer ever recorded in Russia with Moscow temperatures topping 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees C) for the first time. The drought there has sparked hundreds of wildfires in forests and dried peat bogs, blanketing western Russia with a toxic smog. Moscow's death rate has doubled to 700 people a day. The drought reduced the wheat harvest by more than one-third.

The 2007 IPCC report predicted a doubling of disastrous droughts in Russia this century and cited studies foreseeing catastrophic fires during dry years. It also said Russia would suffer large crop losses.

Border bill sent to Obama amid India anger

AFP, Washington

US lawmakers yesterday passed legislation to toughen US-Mexico border security, sending it to President Barack Obama amid anger in India that it is paid for with steep increases in work visa fees.

The senate, in a special session called in the middle of a six-week break, opened briefly and with just two lawmakers to pass the bill in a voice vote called "unanimous consent" typically reserved for uncontroversial items.

Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, a lead sponsor of the measure, offered up the bill, and Democratic Senator Benjamin Cardin -- who hails from Washington's neighbour Maryland -- gavelled it approved.

The measure, unveiled not quite 90 days before November US elections, aimed to add another 1,500 agents and deploy more unmanned aerial vehicles that scan the frontier for undocumented immigrants or illegal drug runners.

The legislation sailed through the House by voice vote on Tuesday during its own special session, called to adopt an emergency spending package to help cash-strapped states.

The legislation's 600-million-dollar price tag would be paid by raising fees on what the measure's backers called a handful of foreign firms that "exploit" US visa programmes to improperly import workers to the United States.

A summary of the bill named Indian firms Wipro, Tata, Infosys and Satyam, which fly thousands of employees each year to the United States to work at their clients' locations as technicians and engineers.

India's National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) has slammed the bill, warning it would boost annual US visa costs for India's outsourcing industry by 200-250 million dollars annually. S Gopalakrishnan, chief executive of India's second-largest outsourcing Infosys Technologies, told reporters late Monday he was "saddened and disheartened" by the step and said the sector would lobby strongly against it.

India, which already holds at least 50 percent of the global outsourcing market, has become the world's back office where Western firms set up call centres, number-crunching and software development outlets to cut costs.

But the 50-billion-dollar industry also sends skilled workers to the United States to develop software and direct projects for US clients.

Advertisement for Bangladesh Malaria Research Institute (বাংলাদেশ মৎস্য গবেষণা ইনস্টিটিউট). It includes contact information, a list of 11 job positions with details on salary, experience, and application procedures, and a closing date of August 13, 2010.

Advertisement for Rajkhanee Unnayan Karpasaka (রাজধানী উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ). It details the recruitment process for 11 positions, including the exam date (August 15, 2010), exam time (10:00 AM - 12:00 PM), and the location (Dhaka). It also provides information about the exam format and the number of candidates per position.