

All 29 trapped in China mine rescued

AFP, Beijing

Rescuers yesterday pulled to safety 29 people trapped in a flooded mine in southwestern China in a rare bit of good news for the country's disaster-prone mining sector.

China Central Television broadcast live images of people being taken on stretchers from the Sichuan province coal mine to ambulances, about 24 hours after they were stranded in the pit, as rescuers and onlookers cheered.

China is accustomed to tragic news about its beleaguered coal miners, while the success in Sichuan stood in stark contrast to the situation in New Zealand, where 29 men remained missing after an explosion at a coal mine last week.

China's official Xinhua news agency said 22 of those rescued were miners, while the other seven were people sent down after the accident in an initial rescue bid who also became trapped.

At least 35 miners were working in the Batian mine near the city of Neijiang when the flood hit, but 13 managed to escape, reports said.

Those pulled out Monday wore eye masks to protect them from the sun after emerging from the dark shafts. Some appeared wet, but state television said those rescued were in stable condition.

AFP was not immediately able to contact provincial and local safety officials for comment.

China's notoriously dangerous coal-mining sector is regularly hit by deadly accidents blamed on the flouting of safety rules as operators try to keep costs down.

The rescue in October of 33 Chilean miners after more than two months underground sparked criticism in China of the government's inability to prevent such mishaps or successfully rescue miners struck by accidents.

Last year 2,631 Chinese miners died in the line of work, according to official statistics, but independent labour groups say the true figure is likely to be much higher as many accidents are believed to be covered up.



Chinese rescuers assist a coal miner who was rescued from a flooded mine in Neijiang, southwest China's Sichuan province yesterday. Rescuers saved all 29 people trapped in the mine in a rare bit of good news for the country's disaster-prone mining sector. PHOTO: AFP

Iran stoning woman's life 'could be spared'

AFP, Tehran

There is a "good chance" that the life of an Iranian woman sentenced to death by stoning for adultery could be spared, the head of Iran's High Human Rights Council said in an interview aired yesterday.

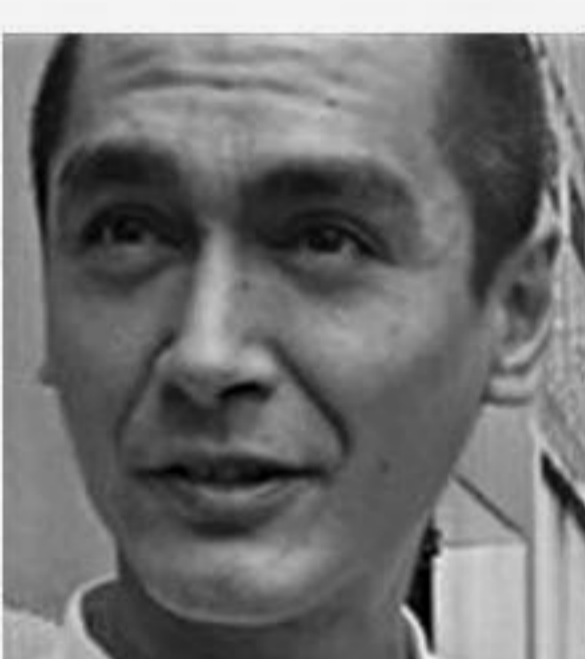
"Our judiciary made a lot of efforts (in reviewing the case) and we think there is a good chance her life could be saved," Mohammad Javad Larjani told Iran's English-language Press TV.

Larjani, who was speaking in English, did not give details of the judiciary's review of the Sakineh Mohammadi-Ashtiani case or the basis of his optimism that her life would be spared.

His council works under the judiciary's auspices.

The sentence handed down against Mohammadi-Ashtiani sparked international outrage and diplomatic intervention by several Western governments as well as the Vatican.

In July, Tehran said that the sentence to death by stoning had been stayed pending a full review of her case.



Junta suspends media for highlighting Suu Kyi

AP, Yangon

Eight magazines in military-controlled Myanmar were suspended by government censors after they prominently published news and photos about pro-democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi's release from 7 1/2 years in continuous detention.

An editor of one publication said the Press Scrutiny board cited the size of a supplementary section about her as a violation of regulations. The magazine Weekly Eleven, a publication that was not suspended, reported in its latest issue that the suspension order for the magazines did not say in what manner the rules were violated.

Suu Kyi was released from house arrest Nov. 13 after having been detained for 15 of the past 21 years. The 65-year-old Nobel Peace laureate has challenged the junta with her calls for democracy but she is enormously popular with Myanmar's citizenry.

The privately owned local magazines that were suspended had printed photos of Suu Kyi in supplementary inserts which were used as wrap-around covers when the issues were put on sale. Daily and electronic media in Myanmar are monopolized by the state, and private publications must submit their material to the censorship board.

The Weekly Eleven news reported that First Eleven Sports Journal and Hote news magazine were suspended for two weeks while 7 Day

News, Venus, Myanmar Newsweek, Hlyat Tappet (Snap Shot), Myanmar Post, Pyithu Khit and The Voice weekly each received a one-week suspension.

"I am surprised and saddened by the suspension of the journal," said an editor of The Voice. "No reason was given but I presume it was because the size of our supplementary page was bigger than the prescribed size." The editor, who spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid possible harassment from the authorities, said the supplementary insert with a photo of Suu Kyi was switched by roadside vendors to serve as the magazine's cover.

"The Press Scrutiny Board said we violated the regulations by printing the second cover the same size as the actual magazine but I think the real reason is for using 'her' photo on the cover," said one of the editors of 7 Day News who also asked not to be named.

The editors said the notification of the suspensions was posted at the Press Scrutiny Board on Sunday.

An unnamed editor at First Eleven said the sports publication may have received its two-week suspension for a front-page headline on a football story that read: "Sunderland Freeze Chelsea United Stunned By Villa & Arsenal Advance To Grab Their Hope."

Different shading on certain letters of the color headline meant it could have been read as "Su Free. Unite & Advance To Grab The Hope."

World mayors sign climate change pact

AFP, Mexico City

Mayors from around the world signed a voluntary pact Sunday in Mexico City to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at a meeting meant as a precursor to UN-sponsored climate talks in Cancun opening next week.

The gathering in one of the world's most polluted cities assembled thousands of local and regional leaders to discuss a wide range of economic and social issues, including climate change.

Participants from some 135 cities and urban areas -- including Buenos Aires, Bogota, Johannesburg, Los Angeles, Paris and Vancouver -- signed the pact which states their intention to adopt a slate of measures to stem climate change.

Each city "will have to register its climate data (commitments as well as performance) in the city climate record" during the next eight months, said Gabriel Sanchez, president of Think Foundation, a Mexican non-profit.

Carbon emissions dip in 2009, to jump in 2010

REUTERS, Singapore

Global emissions of planet-warming carbon dioxide are on track to hit a record in 2010, a leading annual study said yesterday, driven largely by booming economies in China and India and their reliance on coal.

The Global Carbon Project, a consortium of international research bodies, also said annual emissions dipped 1.3 percent in 2009 from 2008 because of the global financial crisis. But the fall was less than half the decrease estimated a year ago.

"The real surprise was that we were expecting a bigger dip due to the financial crisis in terms of fossil fuel emissions," said Pep Canadell, executive director of the Global Carbon Project and one of the co-authors of the study published in the latest issue of the journal Nature Geoscience.

The findings come a week before the start of UN climate talks in Mexico aimed at trying to find a way for nations to agree on a tougher pact to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

But Canadell also said new data and reduced loss of tropical rainforests showed that emissions from deforestation had declined and now comprised about 10 percent of mankind's greenhouse gas pollution. Previous studies have said 12 to 17 percent.

Scientists say rising levels of CO2, the main greenhouse gas, from burning fossil fuels and deforestation is heating up the planet.

Canadell said 2009's drop would prove to be a blip.

Emissions from fossil fuels were projected to

increase by more than 3 per cent in 2010 if economic growth stayed on track, he told Reuters by telephone from Canberra, Australia. This would mark a return to the high growth rates of 2000-2008, he added.

"The implication of this kind of growth rate is that you're quickly moving into well beyond the 2 degrees Celsius warming target," he said, referring to a level beyond which scientists say the world risks "dangerous" climate change.

BIGGER SHARE
Voracious demand for coal, oil and gas by China, India and Brazil as well as demand for their goods was helping drive the increase.

"Emerging economies are taking a bigger share of the global production of wealth and they do it with more carbon-intensive energy systems," said Canadell, a senior scientist with Australia's top research body, the CSIRO.

In 2009, declines in fossil fuel emissions were largest in developed nations. For example, emissions from the United States, the world's second largest carbon polluter, fell 6.9 percent, Britain fell 8.6 percent and Japan fell 11.8 percent.

But emissions from the world's top carbon polluter China rose 8 percent, while India's increased 6.2 percent and South Korea 1.4 percent.

Despite the slight dip in emissions in 2009, the study showed concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere continued rising, reaching a record of 387 parts per million (ppm). This is compared with levels of about 280 ppm at the start of the Industrial Revolution two centuries ago.

Suu Kyi's son granted Myanmar visa

BBC ONLINE

The younger son of Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been granted a visa to visit his mother after her release from house arrest.

Kim Aris, 33, who lives in the UK, travelled to Thailand before his mother was freed on 13 November.

The 65-year-old opposition leader has been kept in detention for much of the past 21 years by the ruling generals.

She has not seen Kim or her elder son Alexander for about 10 years, and has grandchildren she has never met.

Rajapakse expands cabinet ahead of budget

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president expanded his cabinet yesterday, retaining key positions for himself while adding 12 new ministers ahead of the presentation of the first budget of his second term, officials said.

Mahinda Rajapakse kept the crucial defence and finance portfolios for himself and left younger brother Basil in charge of the economic development ministry. He also retained Prime Minister DM Jayaratne.

A dozen junior ministers were promoted in the shake-up, however, which enlarged the cabinet to 59.

He created a new post for "international monetary cooperation" and placed former deputy finance minister Sarath Amunugama in charge of the brief, which is designed to coordinate Sri Lanka's ties with foreign lenders.

Rajapakse, whose swearing in Friday came 10 months after his re-election victory in January, said last week his handling of the economy would replicate his military success in defeating the Tamil Tigers.

Sri Lankan troops crushed a separatist revolt by Tamil Tiger guerrillas last year and the government hopes that the prospects of speedy economic expansion will woo much-needed foreign investors.

He has promised his first budget, to be presented in parliament later Monday, will focus on an economic drive aimed at doubling the country's per capita income to 4,000 dollars by 2016, an official at his office said.



Police install new containers at a new perimeter fence as a heighten terror threat closed the German parliament to visitors in Berlin yesterday. The cupola on Germany's Reichstag parliament building was closed until further notice to visitors after media reports said the popular tourist site was a target for Islamist extremists. PHOTO: AFP

Germany's parliament curbs visitors amid security alert

BBC ONLINE

Germany's parliament building has closed its popular cupola to visitors amid heightened security.

The Reichstag's panoramic viewing area, which attracts up to 10,000 people a day, will be shut until further notice.

Other security measures around the building, visited annually by about one million, have also been increased.

Germany's Der Spiegel magazine has reported the discovery of plans by al-Qaeda linked militants to break into the Reichstag and take hostages.

A spokeswoman for the parliament building told the BBC that guided tours for visitors would continue, despite the alleged threat.

The Der Spiegel report says an informer, who lives abroad, contacted German authorities to warn that a six-strong militant cell was planning an attack in February or March. The informer said two members of the cell were already in Berlin.

He said the other four - a German, a Turk, a North African and a man of unspecified origin - were trying to enter Germany.

The magazine said the informer was a militant who wanted to abandon the group. He feared for his life and wanted to return to his family in Germany, it said.

The informer said the Reichstag was only one of the targets of the planned attack.

Kabul safer than any cities in West: Nato envoy

AFP, Kabul

Children may be safer in the Afghan capital than in London or New York despite a deadly nine-year Taliban insurgency, Nato's top civilian representative in the country has said.

"The children are probably safer here than they would be in London, New York or Glasgow or many other cities," Mark Sedwill told the BBC children's television news programme Newsround to be aired yesterday.

The former British ambassador to Kabul was responding to a question about Afghan children who had told the programme that they felt unsafe on the streets because of the risk of bomb attacks.

Sedwill said there were "very few of those bombs" in Kabul and other major Afghan cities, according to a statement from the BBC.

"Most children can go about their lives in safety. It's a very family-orientated society. So, it is a little bit like a city of villages," he added.

Civilian casualties are at their highest this year since the start of the US-led invasion to oust the hardline Islamist Taliban from power in late 2001.

The United Nations said in August that 1,271 Afghan civilians were killed in the first six months of the year, a rise of one third over the same period in 2009, mostly in insurgent attacks.

The UN report also noted a 55 percent increase in casualties among children.

The UN children's agency said last year that deteriorating security was harming children in Afghanistan, with attacks targeting schools and preventing access to vital health care.

Attacks include mysterious apparent gas poisonings that have been blamed on Taliban militants opposed to girls' education and acid attacks on young girls.

A child was among three people killed on Saturday when a suicide bomber on a bicycle blew himself up in Mihtarlam in eastern Laghman province.

Afghan political parties divided over peace talks with Taliban

AFP, Kabul

Political leaders are divided about talking to the Taliban to bring peace to Afghanistan yet engagement with militants is seen as a necessity for aid agencies trying to improve life in the war-torn country.

Local and foreign fighters say they often have no option but to seek the consent of militant charities to carry out their work, as the violent insurgency rages against foreign forces.

There are now calls for that contact to be stepped up, amid signs of a shift in attitudes towards aid agencies' presence in Afghanistan and hints at a role for some insurgents in the country's political future.

India approves new airport for Mumbai

AFP, New Delhi

India gave the green light yesterday for the construction of a second international airport in Mumbai, a two billion dollar project that was ten years in the making.

"Today, formally the environmental clearance has been given to the Navi Mumbai Project," Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh told a press conference in New Delhi.

The massive new 90 billion rupee airport will be situated in Navi Mumbai or New Mumbai, a booming suburb 50 kilometres (30 miles) southeast of the centre of the city of 18 million people.

Environmentalists had opposed the project on the grounds that it would upset the delicate ecological balance of nearby protected tidal wetland areas.