



A young traveller reads a comic as he sits in a queue at the Eurostar train terminal, at St Pancras International station in London, yesterday. Thousands of angry travellers forced to sleep in airports and train stations across Europe faced more misery Tuesday as fresh snowfalls paralysed transport systems just days before Christmas.

Snow causes travel misery in Europe

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Severe winter weather conditions have left passengers stranded across northern Europe as airports, roads and rail suffer major disruption.

Thousands of flights across the region were grounded on Monday, following a weekend of airport chaos in Britain which saw Heathrow, Europe's busiest airport temporarily close.

British Airways has said the freezing conditions would continue to cause major disruption to its services, cancelling all short-haul flights on Monday. Hundreds of passengers have spent days camping out at the airport in the hope of catching flights before Christmas.

Boris Johnson, the London mayor, has called for a "Herculean effort" by Heathrow operator BAA and its contractors to get planes back in the air, but more snow is expected in the area on Monday afternoon and yesterday morning.

In Germany at least 1,000 flights at the country's main airports were cancelled and many more delayed after around 40cm of fresh snow fell. In France, serious delays were occurring at Paris' two main airports Charles de Gaulle and Orly following an early snowstorm.

However Gatwick, London's second largest airport, was starting to "return to normal" on Monday morning, leading to questions by the government about the nature of the problem at Heathrow.

Philip Hammond, Britain's transport secretary, has promised an inquiry into the way passengers were treated at Heathrow after their flights were cancelled.

"The parent company that runs Heathrow has come under a lot of criticism in the past for not being prepared to put in the sort of investment and infrastructure that would allow the airport to be able to put up with conditions like this," Laurence Lee, Al Jazeera's correspondent at Heathrow said.

"They don't want to pay for it because they say this is a once-in-a-life time event."

The French government has also criticised delays there, with Thierry Mariani, the country's transport minister, saying it was "unacceptable" that some 3,000 people were blocked at Charles de Gaulle airport over the weekend.

He has called a meeting this week of airlines to find ways to improve communication with passengers.

Train travel between Britain and France has also been hit, with passengers for the Eurostar service expected to endure five-hour queues before boarding the trains from London.

Ice roads have also wreaked havoc across the region, including in Britain where some roads have been made impassable after drivers abandoned their vehicles in heavy snow.

Authorities in parts of western Germany have banned trucks weighing more than 7.5 tonnes from highways as a safety measure, while British motoring organisations warned of potentially fatal conditions on the roads.

Forecasters have said Britain is experiencing some of the most severe winter weather in a century, with continued freezing temperatures and snowfall accumulations expected Monday afternoon and evening.

Thai govt to end state of emergency

AP, Bangkok

Thailand will lift a state of emergency today that was imposed eight months ago when Red Shirt protesters overran Bangkok, but the government will retain broad powers to detain suspects and impose order.

Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva said the government felt it no longer needed the sweeping controls imposed during April riots by the anti-government protesters, who camped for weeks in a zone fortified by wooden stakes in the heart of the capital. Clashes between protesters and soldiers left more than 90 people dead.

However, Abhisit indicated the government was still rattled by continuing political turmoil that some feel could explode again into violence.

"Concerned security officials have to be able to monitor peace and order and be ready to handle any untoward incident," Abhisit told reporters after meeting with his Cabinet yesterday to revoke the emergency decree in Bangkok and three surrounding provinces.

Latest Leaks

New Zealand feared China was destabilising Pacific

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand defence officials warned Washington the Chinese army was fuelling political instability in the Pacific, reports citing leaked diplomatic cables said yesterday.

New Zealand raised concerns that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was suspending it on aid to defence forces in the region, particularly Fiji, Tonga and Papua New Guinea, the cables released by the WikiLeaks website said.

In a 2008 cable, US diplomats noted New Zealand was worried Pacific nations "are increasingly turning away from Australia and New Zealand to seek ties with Taiwan, China, Cuba and others", the Dominion Post newspaper reported.

Another briefing from 2006 quoted defence ministry deputy secretary Chris Seed as saying "PLA activities in the Pacific Islands pose real security problems for New Zealand", the NZ Herald newspaper reported.

New Zealand, along with Australia, has traditionally seen the South Pacific as its sphere of influence but the cables show disquiet at China's activities as Beijing vied with Taiwan for diplomatic influence in the region.

One US cable, dated September 2006, said New Zealand's foreign affairs department complained that China spoke about responsible development in the region but "practises the opposite when it comes... to competing with Taiwan".

China's "rapacious quest" for natural resources undermined good governance and sustainable development in Pacific nations, another cable from the same year quotes the foreign affairs department as saying.

Fatah asked Israel to attack Hamas

AFP, Jerusalem

Members of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas' Fatah party asked Israel to attack rival Palestinian movement Hamas in 2007, diplomatic cables leaked by whistleblower WikiLeaks show.

The latest batch of cables quote the head of Israel's Shin Bet security agency as telling US officials that "demoralised" Fatah officials in the Gaza Strip had asked for help against the growing strength of Hamas.

"They are approaching a zero-sum situation, and yet they ask us to attack Hamas," Shin Bet chief Yuval Diskin told US officials. "They are desperate."

He went on to praise his organisation's "very good working relationship" with Abbas' security service, which he said shared with the Shin Bet "almost all the intelligence that it collects."

"They understand that Israel's security is central to their survival in the struggle with Hamas in the West Bank," he said during the June 2007 meeting.

Revelations of such close collusion with Israel against fellow Palestinians is likely to embarrass Abbas and Fatah.

Hamas and Fatah have had tense relations for years, and resentment boiled over shortly after the Islamist group won elections in 2006. A year later, shortly after Diskin's comments in 2007, Hamas routed Fatah in bloody fighting in the Gaza Strip and seized control of the coastal enclave.

The leaked cables were part of a flood of US diplomatic files published online by WikiLeaks, angering and embarrassing governments around the world.

Syria eyed Israel for 2008 killing

AFP, Nicosia

Syria suspected Israel of carrying out the 2008 murder of a top security aide of President Bashar al-Assad, according to US diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks and published by the Guardian yesterday.

The suspicion weakened the case for continuing indirect peace negotiations with the Jewish state that was being put forward by Assad and others within the Syrian government and played into the hands of hardliners, the cables said.

They said that Brigadier General Mohammed Sleiman, a shadow figure whose assassination by a sniper in the coastal city of Tartus on August 1, 2008 Syria kept under wraps for days, was a top "presidential security aide."

"Sleiman enjoyed a reputation among embassy contacts as having special status and proximity to Bashar," one leaked cable said.

"Sleiman was said to have managed special projects for Assad, some of which may have been unknown to the broader Syrian military leadership."

His assassination came just 11 months after an Israeli air strike deep inside Syrian territory destroyed a still shadowy facility that may have been one of the special projects that Sleiman managed.

The desert plant in Deir al-Zor province in northeastern Syria has been the focus of allegations that Damascus was pursuing a nuclear programme with North Korean assistance which have since been under investigation by the UN watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The US cable said that Syria went to immense lengths to keep Sleiman's killing under wraps.

Assange fears Swedish 'injustice'

BBC ONLINE

Julian Assange has told the BBC that he is fighting a Swedish extradition warrant because he believes "no natural justice" would occur in Sweden. Assange was speaking in an interview for the Today programme, at the mansion in East Anglia where he is staying under strict bail conditions.

The Wikileaks founder suggested the two women who have accused him of sexual assault had got into a "tizzy".

Assange denies the allegations and says the case is politically motivated. Assange told the BBC's John Humphrys: "I don't need to go back to Sweden. The law says I... have certain rights, and these rights mean that I do not need to speak to random prosecutors around the world who simply want to have a chat, and won't do it in any other standard way."

He also said the Swedish authorities had asked, as part of their extradition application, that he and his Swedish lawyer be gagged from speaking about the case.

"What is requested is that I be taken by force to Sweden and once there, be held incommunicado; That is not a circumstance under which natural justice can occur," Mr Assange said.

Assange also said it was possible that the allegations against him arose from the two women going to the police for advice rather than to make a complaint.

He said "one description" of what that occurred was that after having discovered they had each been sexually involved with him, they had got into a "tizzy" about the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases, had gone to the police for advice "and then the police jumped in on this and bamboozled the women".

4m Holocaust victims named

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust museum announced yesterday that it has managed to identify two-thirds of the estimated six million Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide.

"In the past decade we have succeeded in adding about 1.5 million victims' names to the names database," Yad Vashem chairman Avner Shalev said in a statement announcing the database now contains more than four million names.

"The Germans sought not only to destroy the Jews, but to obliterate any memory of them," said Shalev.

"One of Yad Vashem's central missions since its foundation, the recovery of each and every victim's name and personal story, has resulted in relentless efforts to restore the names and identities of as many of the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis and their accomplices as possible."

Support builds for approval of US-Russia nuke pact

AP, Washington

President Barack Obama is moving closer to gaining Senate approval of a major arms control treaty with Russia as he builds support among reluctant Republican senators.

The administration has stepped up its lobbying of pivotal Republicans to win approval of the New START treaty, which has become Obama's main priority for the remaining legislative session.

With lawmakers moving toward a final vote expected this week, the White House and senior Democrats were expressing confidence Monday that they had the votes for the accord.

Senior Democrats were pushing for a decisive vote yesterday to cut off debate and set the stage for the final vote. Republicans and Democrats were discussing amendments to the accompanying resolution, not the treaty, that would deal with Republican problems with missile defense and build support for the agreement.

The United States and Russia negotiated the New START pact to cap nuclear weapons and restart weapons inspections in the spirit of U.S. efforts to reset the relationship between the former Cold War foes.

Proponents edged closer to getting the two-thirds vote they needed for ratification as Republican Sen. Scott Brown announced he would support the treaty. In recent days, Brown had received a call from Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Republican Sen. Johnny Isakson, who also heard from Clinton, sent the strongest signal yet that he would support ratification. He said he could see no reason that would prevent him from voting yes.

Treaty backers also were heartened as several Republicans broke ranks, voting against three Republican amendments that would have effectively killed the treaty.

Obama, who delayed his holiday vacation, lobbied senators by phone as he pressed to complete the treaty before January. Vice President Joe Biden also called lawmakers.

Bolstering Obama's argument for quick action, Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sent a letter to lawmakers reiterating support for the accord.

"This treaty enhances our ability to do that which we in the military have been charged to do: protect and defend the citizens of the United States. I am confident in its success as I am in its safeguards. The sooner it is ratified, the better," Mullen wrote.



Georgian men hold a portrait of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin during a rally outside his museum in Stalin's native town of Gori, some 80km from the capital Tbilisi, yesterday to pay tribute to the 131st anniversary of his birth.

ELECTION PROTEST

Belarus jails 600

AFP, Minsk

Belarus yesterday jailed 600 demonstrators detained during a mass rally against the re-election of President Alexander Lukashenko, defying strong Western condemnation of the bloody crackdown.

Police officials said the protesters would be held for up to 15 days while prosecutors probed their potential involvement in "organising mass disturbances" -- a crime that carries a sentence of up to 15 years.

"It is not a fact that all of them will be released after 15 days," Minsk police spokesman Alexander Lastovskiy told AFP.

"All of them will be checked for playing a role in the organisation of mass disturbances. We have enough photo and video evidence," he added.

The official did not specify how many people faced the more serious charges.

Lukashenko vowed Monday to come down hard on all those responsible for taking part in Sunday's unsanctioned rally against his regime.

IVORY COAST CRISIS

Gbagbo ally warns of UN rebellion

BBC ONLINE

An ally of Ivory Coast's incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo has warned UN peacekeepers they could be treated as rebels if they remain in the country after being told to leave.

Gbagbo accuses the UN of siding with his rival Alassane Ouattara and ordered them out of the country.

The UN says Ouattara won last month's poll and has urged all parties to recognise him as president.

It has extended the mandate of its 10,000-strong force by six months.

Gbagbo says the polls were rigged in rebel-held areas of the north and was declared the winner by the Constitutional Council. But the UN mission in Ivory Coast, which was involved in organising the election, backed the electoral commission in saying Mr Ouattara had won.

Gbagbo's Interior Minister, Emile Guirieuoulo, said of the UN mission:

"If, against our will, they want to keep this force in our country, we won't co-operate with them."

"And if they choose to have authorities other than the legal authorities of the country, they become part of the rebellion."

As the stand-off continues, some fear that Ivory Coast could return to civil war.

The election, delayed for five years, was supposed to reunify the world's largest cocoa producer, which has been divided since 2002.

Both Western and African countries have also backed Mr Ouattara.

Iraqi parliament approves new govt

BBC ONLINE

Iraq's parliament has approved a new government including all major factions, ending nine months of deadlock after inconclusive elections.

MPs voted one-by-one for the ministerial candidates nominated by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shia, who was reappointed for a second term.

But doubts persist about whether all the political groups can work together.

The key ministries of interior, defence and national security remain unfilled because nominees could not be agreed.

The BBC's Gabriel Gatehouse in Baghdad says these portfolios are especially sensitive as Iraq's rival factions watch keenly for signs that the country's security forces might be being used to promote sectarianism.

Maliki was nominated for a second term as prime minister in November following a power-sharing deal with all of Iraq's main political factions.

He had been due to unveil his 42-member cabinet on Monday, but last-minute negotiations between rival parties postponed the move.

The following day, with the sticking points supposedly resolved, the Council of Representatives was asked to approve a list of 29 permanent ministers that Mr Maliki read out to the chamber.

The 13 acting appointments do not need to be approved by MPs.

Bomb blast at Nairobi kills three

BBC ONLINE

At least three people have been killed and 39 injured by a bomb explosion at a bus station in Kenya's capital, Nairobi, police have said yesterday.

The blast happened as passengers passed through a security checkpoint before boarding a coach, which was bound for Kampala in neighbouring Uganda.

One of those who died was carrying a bag which contained the bomb, Police Commissioner Matthew Teere said.

Earlier, Uganda's police chief had warned of attacks by Somali militants.

The Islamist group al-Shabab in July said it had carried out twin bomb blasts in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, in retaliation for Uganda's support for Somalia's government.

Career Opportunity in ASA

ASA is one of the leading and sustainable Microfinance Institutions (MFI) in the world. At present, more than 23,000 staffs are working in ASA to serve its almost 6 million members. ASA is also providing Technical Assistance (TA) to NGO/MFIs as well as involved in activating Greenfield microfinance operations in 10 countries of Asia and Africa through ASA International Holding, a company with limited liabilities and registered in Mauritius. Now ASA is looking for a dynamic qualified person for the post of "Group Internal Auditor" to work with its Technical Service Team.

Competency: The applicants must be a Chartered Accountant backed by registration with audit firms having foreign affiliation. The applicant must have at least five years post qualification working experience in well reputed financial institutions in the audit related managerial position.

Capability: He must have capability to plan, coordinate and monitor the audit function of internal audit team working in different entities of ASA International. Capable to prepare standard reports on audit findings and make recommendations to improve ASA International's operational and management practices. Ability to communicate in English with external and internal audit team of the entities located at different countries i.e. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Philippines, Nigeria and Ghana. He should have sound knowledge on practical application of latest version of IAS/IFRS and development of International Standard of Auditing.

Other Terms: Probation period for the position will be for one year. Maximum age of the applicant is 40 years as on 30 January 2011. ASA will offer competitive consolidated remuneration package.

How to Apply: Interested candidates can send their applications to the Director-Accounts (addressing the President, ASA and mentioning the post applied for on the top of envelope) through following postal address or email along with a full CV and recent passport size photographs within 15th January, 2011. No need to send photo copies of certificates, testimonials and other documents with the application by mail. The original copies of certificate must be produced at the time of interview.

ASA- ASA Tower, 23/3, Khilji Road, Shyamoli, Dhaka -1207
Tel: 8155490, 8119828, Fax: 880-2-9121861, E-mail: asabd@asa.org.bd